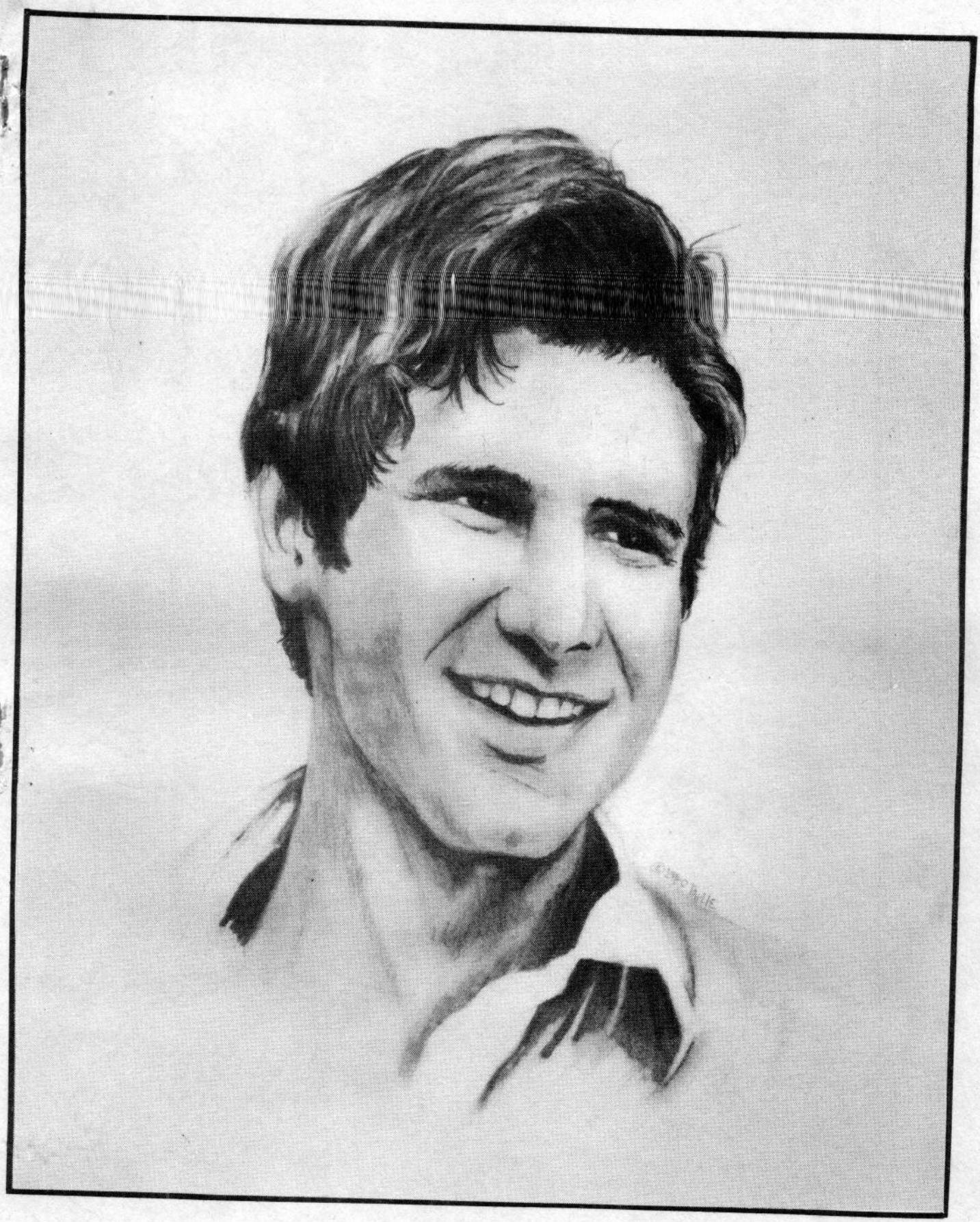

FACETS 9/10

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Ye Olde Editorial

Greetings from K'zoo. This is another double issue (as you may have noticed), but from now on they will all be this size, more or less, but won't be considered doubles. Got that? As of #10 we are going to 2 issues a year. There simply isn't enough for everything that we want to do on top of putting out three issues of FACETS a year. If 2 issues is still pushing us we will go down to 1 issue per year, but we don't think it will go that far. A number of wonderful and willing typists have come forward and that relieves us of a tremendous eater of time. Neither of us can do more than 30 words a minute on a good day. Our next deadline is Sept. 1. '82. The issue after that will be next spring, April 1, '83, in time for Media West Con. Hopefully we can keep to this schedule with no further problems.

Now for the Being An Editor Always Means Having To Say You're Sorry Dept: We have several glitches to apologize for this time around. Last ish we left an artist's name out of the credits. The lovely Indy on page 145 belongs to J.R. Dunster, and we don't know how we managed to leave your name off the credits! Argh ... Another slight went to Dannell Lites whose story "Happily Ever After" was incorrectly credited to Lindsey Nuttal in the Table of Contents. That's the sort of thing that happens when you get in a hurry. *Sigh* Many apologies, Lindsey. And last, but not least, to Martie Benedict for leaving a paragraph out of the middle of her story "The Ganna II Affair". We didn't notice it until a lot of copies had been mailed out. If you were one of those who did not the get insert containing the paragraph, a SASE will get you one. We also apologize for the typos. They were worse than usual and usual is pretty bad. We did read everything this time out very carefully and hope we caught the majority of them.

We have had our Writer's Guidelines available for about 6 months now and have gotten good reaction and bad from them. If you are considering sending us a manuscript, please SASE for the copy of the rules before you submit it. We also give artists' guidelines on it. Careful reading of what we want as well as really paying attention to what is printed in FACETS would save some hard feelings, I'm certain. We try to be flexible and print different things on different occasions but our one hard and fast rule is: no Mary Sue stories. We have had five of them already this spring , partly possibly because there is some confusion as to what constitutes a Mary Sue story. I'll try to clarify it for those of you who are still foggy on the subject:

The term comes from STAR TREK. In specific, it is a story where a Lt. Mary Sue Somebody was practically running the *Enterprise* single handedly, while nursing half the crew, and everyone loved her because she was so wonderful, talented, beautiful ... you get the general picture. The term has grown since to encompass any story in which the female lead is not believable as a human being. Many beginning writers fall into the trap of writing Mary Sue stories simply because much first writing is alter-ego writing, where the author puts herself in the heroine's place and *she* is the one in the SW universe with Luke as a best friend and Han as a lover (or vice versa). Most of us, even if we haven't put this story on paper, have thought about it simply because it's fun, but it's a very personal kind of fun. Outside of maybe a few friends nobody much cares about your adventures with Han and Luke. When this is really what you want to write it's tough to force yourself to write a woman character who is not an alter-ego and who is human, with all the frailties that the human species is subject to. Believable characters are not described as having 'slender, delicate, but calloused hands' that reach up to touch her 'beautiful heart-shaped face'. Anytime we get that sort of adjective list at the beginning of the character description we can almost place a bet that it will turn out to be a Mary Sue story. Nor is a non-Mary Sue related to any of the main characters -- she is not Han's sister, or Luke's cousin, or Boba Fett's mother unless there is a damn good reason for it. She's not 'cute', 'sweet', 'wonderful', 'pert', or any of the other adorable things that Mary Sues are. She's not the best bounty hunter in the galaxy, the fastest gun , the greatest pilot, the best ... (And by the way, this goes for male characters, too -- they must also be believable human beings.) They are just like you and me, just takin' care of business. They have good days and bad, ships that have engine troubles, checks that bounce and headaches. They probably have periods and they certainly go to the john. They dream dreams and get as depressed as anyone else when they don't come true. They don't always win, but neither do they always lose. They can be pilots, whores, rebels, Imperials, bounty hunters, or farmers, but the one thing that they all have in common is that they all have real feelings about real things. There is an excellent book out called AMAZONS edited by Jessica Amanda Salmonson that deals with 'real' women in fantasy settings. I recommend it to anyone who is unsure how a strong female character can or should act. Also recommended is anything by Stephen King, particularly the book THE STAND The character interplay is excellent as are the characterizations of males and females.

On to other matters. BLADE RUNNER has been sneak previewed in Dallas and Denver to the delight of a few of our friends who were lucky enough to make the showings. A couple actually got to meet Harrison as the man did his famous wall paper imitation. Jackie Patterson even managed to get the styrofoam cup he drank out of, lucky girl ....

is 130+ pages. This will be a one-shot with no second printing planned and only pre-orders will be printed. Pre-order deadline is July 1, '82. Total price estimated to be $8 + postage. To reserve a copy send $5 + SASE. ((This is a *must* for any serious Harrison Ford fan!))

Sandi Hendrix, 2016 Sam Houston, Carrollton, TX. 75006, is looking for a Han Solo doll (the large one) If you can help her out please drop her a line.

PHOTOS: Suzanne Jenkins, 4720 NE 74th Ave. Portland, OR. 97218, has 35mm photos of Harrison films, TV shows, TV interviews & specials plus foreign candids. Also has some in-person concert pics of Neil Diamond. SASE for list. Will trade for in-person photos or foreign material.

VHF, Martie Benedict, P.O. Box, 89, Eckert, CO. 81418-0089. VHF is a song cycle born of the composers need to say it with music. There's ballads, blues, rock, country, folk and more, all inspired by Harrison and his film incarnations. Just send *your* blank tape for dubbing plus adequate return postage. Martie does not charge but she does accept donations, contributions, alms, love offerings and loose change. SASE her for more information and see the flyer in this ish. ((There's no way we can recommend these tapes highly enough. You gotta hear them for yourselves!))

GORDON CARLETON STUDIOS presents -- stationary! That's right, now you can have your favorite Gordon Carleton cartoon on stationary or note cards. 33 different cartoons to choose from including "Purina Humanoid Chow", Vulcan Weed" and "Souvenirs of Alderaan". Don't be left out, SASE Gordon immeadiately for more info at 5132 Jo-Don Dr. E. Lansing, MI. 48823. ((Highly recommended!!))

COMLINK, Regina Gottesman, 100 W. 94th St, NY, NY, 10025. A letterzine taking up where ALDERAAN left off. #5 is out with #6 due any time. 3 issues for $2.75. SASE for more info. ((Highly recommended))

PAUL FREEMAN FANS UNITE!! Let's get to know each other and share knowledge and comments. Belloq isn't all bad... Please enclose SASE with your letter for a reply! Jean Duranti 909 N. Palm Ave. 114, West Hollywood, CA. 90069.

THE THOM CHRISTOPER FAN CLUB: This authorized fan club is for you Hawk fans. SASE for more info to; 917 N. Wayne St. #302, Arlington, VA. 22201. If you are an artist or writer currently working with HAWK/BUCK ROGERS material and are interested in being included in our newsletter or year book send xerox copies and return SASE to TCFC Publications 900 Leverton Rd. Rockville, MD. 20852.

NIGHTSHADE: an AFTERWORLD Comix from LARRY BLAKE. She's an android built to fight crime, but she's also more. SASE to Larry Blake, Box 35 S. Vienna Ohio, 45369, for more info. ((Highly recommended))

WANTED: anything and everything on Harrison Ford, also Mark Hamill, Carrie Fisher, Sean Connery & Malcom McDowell. Will buy or trade for photos. Also interested in trading photos for video tapes (VHS) of movies. Write to Leonard May Brecht, c/o Bauer, Hof Guldenwerth 72, D-5630 Remscheid 1, WEST GERMANY. ((Highly recommended!))

JELLY BABY CHRONICLES: from Paulie, #39 Bennett St. Pontaic, MI. 48058. Devoted to the 4th Dr. Who (Tom Baker). #1, $6 1st class. Holiday issue is $6 1st class. #2 will be out soon. ((Recommended!))

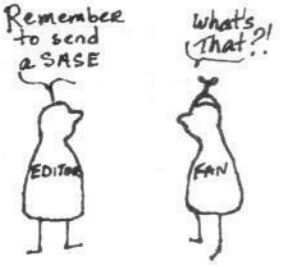
T'KUTIAN PRESS has a host of goodies to offer; SYNDIZINEII is based on both movie and TV shows. Contains continuations of "Rat Patrol", "Time After Time", "Starsky & Hutch", "Shogun" and more. $11.45 1st class, $10.35 UPS,
THE OBSC'ZINE features mostly TREK material of an adult nature. #5 is $7.05 1st class, $6.50 UPS, $6.40 3rd.
SNOW ON THE MOON is a one-shot collection of Anji Valenza's Klysadel universe. Illoed by Anji. $11.45 1st, $10.35 UPS, $11 3rd class. SASE for more info on these and other projects to:T'Kutian Press, 5132 Jo-Don Dr. E. Lansing Mi. 48823.

READERS OF THE LOST JOKE -- Gordon Carleton's storyboarded poster of the adventures of intrepid archaeologist Michigana Jones is printed on 11 x 17 65 lb. gold parchment with brown ink, in a limited, numbered edition. Price: $3.25/1st; $4/UPS; $4.30/Europe; $4.75/Australia. Mailed in a rolled cardboard tube. Won "Best Cartoon" at Denvention II (WorldCon '81)! 5132 Jo-Don Dr. E. Lansing, MI. 48823. ((Highly recommended!!))

SNAKE PLISSKEN FANS -- Lori Carleton is looking for you. An ESCAPE FROM NEW YORK one shot is in need of authors and artists. SASE at the Carleton address.

THE DAVID WARNER FANDOM NETWORK: $6 1st year. Get 8x10 photo, video tape list, outlets for buying photos, and 4 news letters. This club is authorized! ROSCIUS MAXIMUS: Devoted to the career of David Warner. Due out Spring '82. Contents include a TIME AFTER TIME sequel and a NIGHTWING prequel. SASE Otter Limits Press, #39 Bennett St, Pontaic, Mi. 48058.

INDY/FORD FANS! FANS OF FORD is an information and letter zine. Looking for submissions of letters and filler art.Subscriptions 4 issues/$10. For more info write Becky Novak, P.O. Box 6152, Ft. Lauderdale, Fla., 33310



MAGNUM P.I. FANS! Hanover Press is considering a MAGNUM P.I. one shot. We'd be interested to hear from artists, authors, and readers who might be interested. Projected deadline, fall '83. 1359 Portage #1, Kalamazoo, MI. 49001.

Bagels 'n LoCs

Joan B. Shumsky, 24 Meehan Ave., Raritan, NJ 08869

As one of the 'over 300' people to answer your ad in STARLOG, I want to take this opportunity to thank you for opening a whole new area of fandom to me ... the Harrison Ford area. Before I saw the ad I didn't realized that FACETS existed and although my first purchases began with issues #5 and #6, I lost no time in sending for reprints of #1-#4. ((That's what we like, satisfied customers.))

Now to #7/8. The idea of a double issue is an excellent one. Although the wait may be longer, I'll opt for more content any time. The overall look of the zine, from Karen River's Indy cover to Dot Sasscer's illo of Han was superb! I'm happy to see new artists featured, particularly the fantastic work done by Barbara Fister-Liltz. I'm familiar with Barb's work for THE WORLD OF DARK SHADOWS and this is an entirely different interpretation of her talent. I hope we see more of her work in future issues of FACETS. As always, Gordon Carleton's cartoon illos are a howl!

Now to the poetry ... this section in any zine is fast becoming my favorite. I have truly learned to appreciate this art form and the pieces in this issue are outstanding. Far and away my favorite is "In the Silence at Midnight" by Marcia Brin. Marcia's poetry which has graced so many fanzines has the ability to get right to the heart of the matter ... the Han-Leia relationship this is, which, as far as I'm concerned, is the only way to go! The accompanying illo by Daphne Hamilton brought this beautiful poem to life. Further, "Night Thoughts" by Mary Carson and "The Man with the Child in his Eyes" by Karen Miller were also superb. Each captures Han's thoughts and his speech patterns with such accuracy that they were truly a delight to read. I particularly liked to read the 'big brother' protectiveness of Han toward Luke in "Man with the Child..."

One of my favorite pieces has to be "Han and the Irate Husband" by G.F. Elwood. My own dear husband thinks I've flipped out with my involvement in fandom, particularly where a certain Corellian is concerned ... but I just bat my baby blues at him and tell him that Han is only a fictional character, not a home wrecker, and that since I don't spend too much money, or buy designer clothes, or smoke, and only drink in moderation ... (tsk, tsk), a gal's got to have some vice, doesn't she??? (Heh, heh, heh) NOTE: Anyone wanting to use the above excuse has my permission to do so!

"The Ganna Two Affair" was most interesting because the author let us see another 'facet' of Han. Who would have thought he could be involved in a 'dirtside' sport such as galactic motocross? Good show! "The Invisible Fan" by Eva Albertsson is the second 'Ford meets Solo' story I've read. While the premise is excellent, neither of the two stories gets into the reason for the existence, on parallel planes, of the two characters. I realize it was meant to be funny, and it was, but too much is taken for granted. I know these stories are strictly done for laughs, but it would be most interesting to get into a real dialogue between the SW characters and their real Earth counterparts ....

"Eyes of a Jedi" by J.A. Berger is another beautiful example of the relationship between Han and Luke. Even thought Luke pulled Han through this one, Han's protectiveness, even though seriously wounded, was beautifully portrayed. Lovely story.

"Lesser Artifacts" by Peggy Barilla disturbed me in that she portrayed Indy as a burgeoning lush. Sorry, I don't buy it. Although he got smashed in RAIDERS when he thought Marion was dead, that was a perfectly normal reaction, but he recovered quickly and went back to 'work'. His profession and the mere fact that his survival on so many harrowing expeditions depends on his brain functioning at all times without an alcoholic cloud hazing it. Further, I don't think he'd have a job too long if he became enamoured of the bottle, especially back in the '30's when moral codes were so rigid. Please, authors, take him off the sauce! I believe he's strong enough not to let personal loss affect him that way.

Regarding Indy's relationship with Marion, this is the second tale I've read where they go their separate ways. Can't say this bothers me. I see Indy with a gorgeous sophisticated-type lady who is his intellectual equal and who just happens to look like Veronica Hamel from HILL STREET BLUES .... ((To each his, or her, own. Personally, we think Indy and Marion are a terrific match.))

Finally. "I Do?", although it was meant to be funny, and it was ... Wow! what a fantastic idea. It's the first Han story I've read giving him a 'royal' background. I'd like to see someone write a serious tale with this theme. It opens up a whole new area of Han stories and it's the only one that hasn't been explored in depth.

Barbara E. Brayton, 1550 Sherman, #303, Denver, Col. 80203

Having read FACETS #7/8, I do have some comments to make. First, I must thoroughly disagree with Eva Albertsson on Leia. She is not by any means a flat or mediocre character. It has become fashionable to fault George Lucas' imagination in Carrie Fisher's acting and this is simply unfair.

"Lesser Artifacts" was an excellent story, though I didn't necessarily agree that Indy and Marion can't make a go of it. (As an afterthought, it is quite probable that cockroaches, and their insect relatives, will outlive us all)

"The Many Faces of Captain Solo" was an interesting article, showing a lot of research. I personally feel that Han and Leia are now a twosome, period. Also, I seriously doubt that he will be killed off in REVENGE. I can still remember the tempest in a teapot over that possibility in TESB.

I enjoyed both "The Invisible Fan" and "I Do?" Both were very clever. Han the son of the true Emperor? That's great!

My favorite pieces were "Hey Lady", and by far, "The Man with the Child in his Eyes", "In the Silence at Midnight", and "Eyes of a Jedi". Why? Because they touched me, they captured the true spirit of TESB. It's been frustrating reading so many stories with no positive emotional content. It's unfortunate so many people have decided that TESB is nothing but gloom, gloom and more gloom because they are dead wrong. Forget Vader, Jabba, the Empire, all those petty, power-hungry, greedy people. They don't count. The love, the selflessness, the friendship (your fight is mine) the courage and hope, these are the things that count.

I enjoyed all the writing and artwork, especially the front and inside back covers, Wanda Lybarger's work and the simple illo accompanying "In the Silence". There was a problem with missing or blank pages; it does tend to spoil your concentration. ((Sigh -- always knew I'd do that one day! Apologies, all)). All in all, this is your best ish so far.

Fran Husejinovic, 1722 Decatur St., Ridgewood, NY 11385

I had to write and say how much I enjoyed #7/8. It was truly a great zine. I especially fell in love with the cover of Indy. It is an excellent likeness of Harrison as Indiana Jones. I wouldn't mind having a copy to hang on my wall.

I like all the poetry and stories in this issue. I also like the picture of Harrison by Connie Pirovetes. Great artwork. I didn't like the "Ganna II Affair" by Martie Benedict very much. I liked all the poetry, it was all very good.

I enjoyed the article on "The Many Faces of Captain Solo". I found it very informative since I'm new to SW, TESB and RAIDERS zines. Are any of the zines that Chris Callahan listed in her bibliography still available? (We don't have the answer. Fellow eds, can you help?))

I liked the story by Peggy Barilla. It showed a different side to Indy. Very well done. "The Invisible Fan" by Eva Albertsson was delightful. I really enjoyed it and chuckled through the entire story. The ending to "I Do?" was perfect. I laughed while I was reading it, and the characterization of Han was also very good. My favorite story in the entire zine was "Eyes of a Jedi" by J.A. Berger.

I liked most of the artwork in the zine. FACETS is really nice and well put together. Give yourselves a gold star for a job well done.

Mary Sue Alterego, RR #4, Box 27-B, E. Cowflop, Utah 82062

I seen yor zine and I thought, shit, I can write that good! Do you want some of my stories? They are about Han Solo mostly, or Illinois Jones, or whatever the guy's name with the hat is. I can draw real good, too. I like to draw Han with his pants down. Ha! Ha!

Who the fug is Ben Adrick? He was in SW? No way -- I seen that four times. I bet that Lybarger person likes to draw Solo with his pants down too. Ha, ha!

Peggy Barilla sure is a depressing broad, ain't she? Couldn't read the funny handwriting story, but the cartoons was good. Well, keep up the good work. What's a SASE? ((This is no joke people, we actually got this in the mail and we have the postcard to prove it!))

Nancy Baker, 1411 NW 78th St., Des Moines, Iowa 50311

Loved #7/8. After a solo (hah) trip I was met at the airport by husband and kids bearing FACETS, which had arrived while I was gone. Now why did they have to bring it to the airport? I couldn't very well ignore them and start reading, could I?

When I did get to read it I turned to the Indy stories first, eager to see what would be done with a new character of Harrison's.. I liked them both but as a Marion fan I found it hard to take Marion and Indy separated twice in one issue. But the style of writing in both were excellent and the manner of telling what had gone before in "Lesser Artifacts" did not lose me (easy to do).

Now about "Marion's Diary". I felt as if I were reading a diary, kinda sneaky-like. And I enjoyed it (the diary, not the feeling.) But I have an argument about the progress of the affair. I would have thought, from the little we know (from the book only) that they would have been on affectionate terms for a while before progessing to intimacy. As it is, Indy seems too much like a calculating lous, rather than a weak -- ah -- louse. The picnic, yes definitely it would have been the picnic. And Marion would have been more unsure, shall we say?

There was a page or something missing in "The Ganna II Affair" right in the middle of the description of the delectable Trella. I could follow the story without it, however. It told me more about biking than I wanted to know, but that's just my lack of interest in bikes. I do wish George would follow the lead of this and other fanfic and have a heroine over 5'2". If you are 5'2" or less I apologize, but fair's fair. Karen Allen may be over that, but Marion in the book is not.

"The Many Faces of Captain Solo" gave me insights as to Han's treatment in fanfic be-

fore I ever read any, and "Han and the Irate Husband" hit the spot (see first paragraph of this letter). Of the other stories, I prefer the Han and Leia ones best because I just like Han and Leia stories, humorous like these, and serious too. Actually I enjoyed just about all the poetry. The two Kenny poems were very good. I liked the Kenny vignette too. Writing about Kenny must be hard, because his past, and maybe his future is -- well, depressing. Wonder if Arouk did away with Melissa. Also liked most of the art.

Larry Blake, Box 35, S. Vienna, Ohio 45369

The following is in reply to the letter from Miss Piggy which appeared in the Letters of #7/8:

My Dear Porker,

You are quite mistaken as to the intent of my "frog lips" comment. (It would've been much more unseemly to call Harrison Ford "frog tongue" and not nearly as funny.)

So you see, Bacon Thighs, I LIKE FROGS! Have since I was a little tad of a fellow, and probably will till I croak.

My folks liked frogs, too especially the legs. (I, of course, didn't indulge) I had a friend who was a frog . A real prince of a fellow.

Yes, Oinker, surely a beautiful, gracious lady such as yourself, will be able to find it in your chubby little heart to forgive me. Of course you can. And speaking of courses, the next time you are in town, let's get together for a nice ham dinner, eh?

Martie Benedict, Box 89, Eckert, Col. 81418

This is an official letter of comment, not to be confused with the usual letter of silliness. With the exception of my own story which I darn near know by heart and was mercifully excused from reading, I've read everything in #7/8 and can say, with confidence that I won't be contradicted, you are getting better on all fronts -- overall layout is beautiful and the quality of submissions is uniformly high. From Karen River's Indy to Dot Sasscer's Han, cover to cover, a really superior product.

It was good of you to utilize your editors' prerogative and 'soap box' on the humane treatment of animals. That's what an editorial column is intended for, after all. May it have its intended effect.

The strange thing about the letters column is the deja vu quality imparted by the time lapse. So many people who were only names before are now good friends (hi, guys!) Very strange indeed.

Marcia's "Gestalt" was as good as ever, fittingly accompanied by Connie Pirovetes' beautiful portrait. His eyes are luminous. An excellent opening feature.

I do have one comment on "The Ganna II Affair" courtesy of a friend who just successfully concluded what could have been a very touchy and potentially dangerous *menage a trois:* Isn't it wonderful to have your husband and your lover together as friends? Yes, Virginia, there is a Santa Claus. No hard feelings about the missing paragraph , by the way. I have become so used to Wanda's ability to turn out wonderful action illos she rarely surprises me anymore, but her uncanny ability to capture a likeness from a brief glimpse of a photograph continues to astound me. Everybody recgonizes Frank right off. ((For those uninitiated, Frank is Martie's husband, and makes a guest appearance in "Ganna II" and this issue's "Twink" as Ben Adrick)). Bouquets to you, Wanda -- nobody does it better. And probably even more appealing were the illos for Eva Albertsson's outrageous and delightful "Invisible Fan". Harrison in his sneakers and Solo trick, berated by the "Gumby" director as Carrie looks on and David swelters makes you want to stand up and die! While I'm on it, I enjoyed that crossover romp more than anything else in the zine. The hilarity is sustained throughout by Eva's urbane and witty detachment and splendid use of dialogue.

There were qite a few what I could call introspective poems included, weren't there? Han's or some ones' musings over life's vissicitudes. My favorites were Marcia Brin's "In the Silence at Midnight" and Marcia Wickes' "Star Light, Star Bright", though I thought all had meat. I am puzzled as to just what "Yoda's Garden" is doing in FACETS. Of course if you just tell me, "It's my zine and I'll run what I please" I'll understand perfectly. ((Partly that, and partly it does tie in with TESB, so we figured we could get away with it.))

Peggy Barilla is one of the very best writers around. She reminds me of a fast-paced John O'Hara. That's why her "Lesser Artifacts" left a terrible taste in my brain for days. Unfortunatly her extrapolation of the course of Indy and Marion's relationship is probably accurate, and I am cross with her for being so damn astute and thereby jarring me out of my pleasant euphoria at lovers reunited. Shame on you, Peggy, but congratulations on one hell of a fine if depressing story.

Lindsey Nuttal's offerings were consistently great! I was not familiar with her name. That's not surprising, though, I'm still in the novice class. But she didn't turn up on Chris Callahan's exhaustive bibliography either, which might lead me to conclude that she's just getting into the genre, and if so, what a marvelous beginning. (If I'm wrong, apologies for ignorance. As you know I live out here in the woods with the bears and my phone, my post office box and my FACETS is the only contact I have with the outside world!) Ah, but her "I Do?" was a lovely fantasy. Dot Sasscer's accompanying Han was most nice, too. The

following story, "Partners", was excellent, too. There was an easy unforced feel to it, well managed dialog, and a completely acceptable plot. An enjoyable brisk read. Larry Blake's Han and Chewie on page 102 is excellent. His use of Ciaroscura is very effective, and his unique and easily recognizable style is refreshing, a real pleasure. And if Lindsey did write "Happily Ever After" -- there were some equivocal author credits -- then much applause! And if it was Dannell Lites, same goes! (("Twas Dannell -- that's what happens when you're in a hurry ...)) Gordon's Han and Leia were painfully funny. That snarling, irrepressible Corellian with lovestruck Leia hanging onto his arm keeps me grinning.

Now, tucked away in there just a little left of center is a lovely unpretentious gem -- "Rainbows", with Martynn's art. This introspective in a story format is profound and touching. Very much the man. I feel his hurt. And while I have kicked around the notion that Kenny might not choose to sit with legs crossed, nor embrace his guitar quite so gracefully, the portrait is so exquisite and lyrical I find it doesn't matter, really. ((The pose in the picture is at least partly, if not wholly, my doing. I asked Martynn if she could transform a pic of Steve Martin playing the banjo into Kenny with guitar, and that was the pose in the picture.))

Moving over a page, I had the pleasure to read Gracia Fay's "Han and the Irate Husband" some months ago, and I still love the line, "I don't like having Han looking over my shoulder." Anyone with a man and a picture on her wall can identify with that. Maybe ruefully, maybe uproariously, maybe secretly, but Gracia Fay has a way of nailing down universal truths that enchants me. Hope she continues to submit her work to FACETS. ((Be looking for her in thish, and in future.))

Then there's Jean Ann's "Eyes of a Jedi" and I defy anyone to find fault with her characterization this time. The story is at once gritty and fiveting and ultimately magical in its resolution. With regard to Paulie's art, it's always seemed to me that the function of an illustrator was to enhance the reader's perception of a story by helping them visualize more clearly the events taking place, though not all illustrators achieve -- or even aim for -- that goal. When I read Jean's story in manuscript my mind's eye painted vivid pictures (which is a mixed metaphor, but never mind. I'm on a roll...) because of the strikingly cinematic quality of her storytelling. What I 'saw', then, on first reading is almost exactly what I saw in Paulie's illos. So perfectly executed and suited to the action. Page 124 is breathtaking, perhaps the finest piece of artwork in the entire issue.

I can't find an art credit for the Indy facing my lyric on page 144 ((blush, we did it again. Apologies again, J.R.)), but my feeling is that is one incredibly beautiful portrait just to decorate a sleazy little blues. Well, thanks anyway for being so generous to ol' Dr. Jones with his bedside manner. And my compliments to the artist. Really, it's rather like elegant icing on a small brown cupcake ...

Parenthetically, here, I've been told that my songs are just not making it as poems. I agree, and suggest that, if you use any more of the dozens at your disposal, the readers are encouraged to hum a little tune along with the lyrics -- any little tune. It may help. I would also suggest ordering the tapes, but *caveat emptor*. ((We also strongly suggest buying the tapes, folks -- terrific stuff there.))

Ladies, I love FACETS I never felt so happy with a zine before. If praise helps salve the wounds caused by the hazards of the 'ensemble' effots, then praise you shall have from me at least. And appreciation and gratitude for making it all possible. (We keep telling ya, we're the talent coordinators . All praise goes to our talented contributors. Take a bow, all.))

Nancy Elizabeth Welch, 29 Fulton Rd., Manchester, Conn. 06040

#6 was my first FACETS, and I got it around November (yes, I'm one of the STARLOG crowd. I was willing to spend more than a dollar). I didn't know what the hell I was getting myself into but I sent my money anyway because I was so damn curious. I was pleasantly surprised.

The poetry in 7/8 was great, especially "A Little Song Composed in a Cantina" by L. Nuttal (two sets of breasts? No jogging for this girl). Also enjoyed "Indiana" by M. Benedict. I'm partial to the second verse: "I never was into kinky stuff/Till I saw you with your whip ... " Guess you don't have to be in the tropics to get the 'hots' when you're with Dr. Jones.

I liked most of the humorous poetry, but what can I say, it was all great. In my opinion everything in the zine is great, regardless of its quality in literary or artistic terms. The fact that it's written and drawn with such obvious deep affection for Mr. Ford and his work is beautiful in itself. And like Martynn says, it sure must build character. I'll bet HF would be happy to know he's helping to build the characters of dozens (?) of young American women ...

I loved Eva Albertsson's "Invisible Fan"!! It was out of this world. I giggled through the entire thing, especially when the Actor offered to fix the roof. From what I've read about HF I could easily imagine him getting more excited over fixing a roof than making a movie. (If only carpenters could be millionaires, we'd probably never see him in another movie) I also enjoyed the part when Arouk takes off on the bike -- I can just see this bike going down the street with no one on it ... (I think Arouk ought to drop by again sometime in the future) ((We're willing .... Eva, care to comment?)) Eva's great -- what an imagination!

My other favorite Hanstories were the very amusing "Happily Ever After" by Dannell Lites (Han as a male concubine -- I could believe it). "The Ganna II Affair by M. Benedict contained a most memorable line. I wrote it down in my book of memorable phrases and interesting statements. "My past is like a dog on the trail of my present." I really like that.

"Partners" was good, but I'd like to know how Chewie escaped.

"Eyes of a Jedi" by J.A. Berger I liked very much even though I found it a bit unbelievable at the end when Luke got his sight back so quickly. Well, at least no one got spanked in this one. (sorry) I wasn't sure if I wanted to read this one

by J.A. Berger since I was disappointed (that's putting it mildly) with her last story in #6. I'm glad now I did. She shows us very well the deep, caring friendship Han and Luke have; the love and loyalty they have for each other . I didn't enjoy "A Bad Case of Corellian". I don't see how anyone else could unless they get a kick out of seeing Leia treated like dirt. As for her being a hard character to bring life to -- I don't know, but common sense tells me there are other things you can do with this character besides turn her into the scapegoat of the story. I agree with Ronni Sacksteder and her comments so I won't go into it too much. Let me just say that it's not only an injustice to portray Leia as such an airhead, but here's another fan who could never imagine Han hitting a woman. ((Editorial interruption here: for those of you who came in late, let us clarify. Han did not hit Leia, he spanked her. In our book that is a difference, and on that grounds we let it stand. As for actually hitting a woman, it would depend if she deserved it or not)) This is the kind of thing that happens in a John Wayne an Maureen O'Hara movie. Han is a bit of a male chauvanist, but there's no need to dump on Leia to show the macho side of his personality.

The few Kenny Boyd stories and poems I've seen up to now have been good but depressing as hell. Can't some character in someone's next story call the VA hospital and get this guy some help? ((I've got a plot if someone will write it for me -- any takers?)) I don't mean that as a joke either. The reason these stories bother me so much is because this subject is real -- there are real men out there suffering like this. I met a few, and it's a really sad thing. This character still has love in his heart and a gentle soul or he would not be so troubled. His inability to love himself after all the death and destruction he's seen and participated in is why he won't allow himself to succeed at anything. He doesn't beleive he deserves to. How long could a man feel this way without breaking down completely? Not very long in real life. Kelly's story "Rainbows" was nice because it showed me a sort of positive and almost peaceful side to this sad, tormented character.

I thought "Lesser Artifacts" by P. Barilla was very well written but I can't see an educated man like Indy using the 'fuck', even if he's drunk. I see from your rules that you can use the word 'fuck' as long as it's not describing the act itself ((Not our rules -- Lucas')) Very interesting.

I liked all the illos, in particular the back inside cover and pg. 88 by Dot Sasscer. And the one on pg. 145 -- who was that done by? ((Apologies again. J.R.)) The illos by Larry Blake for "Partner" were really good.

Last but not least thanks for the info on the mistreatment of animals during the making of some films. From what I heard about HEAVEN'S GATE it deserved to bomb. Just desserts, I say. Does all this so-called 'realism' make for a better movie? I don't think so. It's immoral and unnecessary. I always thought film was supposed to be art, illusionism.

Well, I'm through ... considering that comment I made about Han being a chauvanist, maybe in more ways than one. Please don't anyone put a contract out on me or anything like that, ok?

J. R. Dunster, 3260 Montrose, Glendale, CA. 91214.

Loved #7/8! Very nicely put together. But you guys didn't put my name on the artist's list! Tsk tsk. ((Blush! We *are* sorry!))

I'm not much good at reviewing stuff... I loved the stories and the art. *Especially* the art! I'm an artist myself so I guess I can appreciate it more. There's something I've wanted to ask all you artists: What materials (inks, pens, papers) do you use? I'm always looking for a new technique. ((Don't be shy artists, we'd *love* a good article on how you do what you do so well)) I *love* talking about art materials!

My main reason for writing this LoC is to share with you-all my many HF tales. They're not exciting, but I can almost guarantee that you haven't heard them before. So 'Live From the Los Angeles Basin:

Last year, around Easter, some friends and I went down to the heart of L.A. where we were told BLADE RUNNER was filming. I must confess that I had no illusions of meeting or seeing Mr. Ford or any other well-known people there. I figured seeing a film being shot (especially SF) would be worthwhile enough. I was *not* dissappointed. The hardware and cars (by Sid Mead, my idol!) were FABULOUS! The atmosphere the crew had created was great too; the trash in the gutter, (as if L.A. needed any more) the smoke pots that let off a thick mist and musty smell, the rain machines... I half believed I was in the 21st Century myself!

The "star" wasn't expected to arrive for a few hours when we got there, so in the meantime we busied ourselves making friends with the extras and crew. I remember meeting one fellow, Jesse, who told me he had a line in the film. Apparently he says to a hooker: "I've got the leather if you've got the chains." Watch for him, hopefully his scene won't be cut. He wears a strange purple suit.

At one point we were asked to leave the filming area by a 2nd Assistant Director. But, being foolhardy and adventursome, we snuck inside the Bradbury building (they were shooting in the doorway). We were nicely tucked out of the way and bothering no one. It was very interesting -- we could see the video monitors and could hear the director outside. *Then*, Mr. Ford and that annoying A.D. walked in. Mr. Ford looked over at us quickly and then whisked by, whilst the A.D. came over, started to chew us out, and *out* we went on the street once more! Actually, it wasn't

such a bad thing, since the view was better outside.

Once there, we hung around a guy we'd met earlier. He had told us he was "a friend of the star". Before long the fellow called Harrison over to where we were standing and asked him why all the guests were being booted off the set? (The friend of HF's had been booted off too.) Harrison, eyes sliding suspiciously over us, told his friend that everyone was paranoid that night and he wasn't really sure *what* exactly was going on. I was thrilled, needless to say, to see Mr. Ford, but my friends... they had glassy-eyed stares and I could tell they were not hearing a thing HF was saying! He looked pretty good. Usually celebrities don't live up to their screen image, but not so in his case. Even if I wasn't prejudiced, I'd say he looked *better* in person than in many photos and movies. He looked younger and more even-featured -- we all agreed on that later. Then, later in the evening we saw him sauntering about in that strange costume of his. (I think we saw the guy who plays Sebastian, too.) We finally left at their "lunchbreak" which was around midnight. And, as luck would have it our car battery was dead! So, a few of us returned to the filming location and brought back some of the crew to help get the car started. (Those guys were *great* -- so nice and helpful.) Then we drove home chattering on and on about our good fortune.

One afterthought: We were told by HF's friend that the annoying 2 A.D. was Harrison's bother Terrence. To me this sort of makes sense. When I first saw the A.D. I thought he looked a lot like Harrison. It was dark, but his bone structure looked the same. (this is an artist talking).

My 2nd tale: I took a pastel techniques class this fall. (What does a pastel class have to do with HF? Just wait ...) One week our teacher had us do a portrait as homework. Naturally, I did one of you-know-who (used the photo from BR). The teacher said, "Oh, yeah, I know someone who worked on that movie" when she saw my portrait. I forgot all about it until a few weeks later when Dorothy came up to me and said she'd been ro Ridley Scott's birthday party. He was the friend she mentioned before! She met Harrison there, and while she was chatting with him she told him how I had done the portrait in her class. He said, "You mean all this is going on behind my back?"

The third and final (for the time being) tale: I talked to a fellow student who knew Harrison about four years ago. It seems the guy worked in a grocery store and about once a month HF would come in a buy a crate or two of oranges. Everyone would give him a doubletake. No one could figure out what he could do with all of those oranges. (Now wasn't that a juicy tale? Yuk, yuk ...)

Better go now. Don't want this to drag on for too long. Oh yes, one last thing. I'm very new to zines and I must say it's been great so far. Everyone's so nice! (Corny slush -- shut up. J.R.)

Dot Sasscer, 7081 Bowman St., Potsdam, NY 13676

I really would like to LoC a few things that I've read in it (#7/8). Hope you don't mind. The A number one thing I'd like to say is, what a pretty zine! Being new to the crew, I'm glad to be a part of such a nicely laid out zine. On to more specific things ... I haven't had much of a chance to get engrossed in the larger works yet, but I would like to comment on some of the shorter ones, like "Lesser Artifacts" by Peggy Barilla. A really nice idea, if I'm interpreting it correctly. It was rather confusing, though -- even after my second careful reading I'm not sure what was reality and what was his own drunken dreams. Actually I think I'm more perplexed as to whether or not Indy and Marion were actually married in this story. I wish she would've made some of those things more clear. By far the best short poem in the zine was Marcia Brin's "In the Silence at Midnight". In the past year and a half, Marcia has gotten infinitely more sensitive and smooth with regard to relaying her characters' thoughts. More and more the lines seem to come naturally, as though they really were spoken by the characters. Bravo! I think these midnight thoughts are by far the best I've read in the way of Han's reflections on his lady.

The one longer piece that I did have time to read is "Excerpts from a Diary". I'm both pleased and disappointed in this piece. I think it had a lot of potential that the author didn't explore. First, the positive: I really like the way she handled the essence of the 15 year old's thought processes. I think that her handling of the things that a girl that age would focus on was very good. Unfortunately, I don't think she brought out enough of the future Marion's character. Not possible, you say -- the Marion we saw was ten bitter years later. Yes, indeed, it was, but I still think there were other things that were a part of Marion's character that could have been used effectively in this piece, such as her very sarcastic and gutsy nature. I think that she would have exhibited these things even at that age. If she didn't possess them at the time of the story, then she wouldn't have survived the following ten years without Indy and travling all over the world. She just wouldn't have been able to take it. The other things I'd like to simultaneously praise and (ahem) object to is poor Marion's obsession ... well ... fascination ... overly descriptive lauding of (ahem) dear Indy's bod. I think that we're all pretty well acquainted with how ... nicely ... Indy performs and moves, etc., etc., and the descriptions were ... *cof* intense and ... vivid, but they did get to be a little excessive after a while. I mean, let's be serious here. Marion sounds like she was only in love with Indy for his person ... (*sigh*) but it just doesn't hold up when you compare it to the movie ten years later. There had to be something more intense there, something more intellectual in nature for Marion to be able to justify, ten years later, picking up and trying again at a relationship with Indy. And the diary would be a perfect place to explore these kinds of intimate thoughts concerning her love, not her lust for Indy. I also think that she probably would have mentioned more of the endearing and genuine things that Indy had to say to her concerning his feeling for her. I think that those are the things that a girl cherishes most when it comes to the person she loves -- the things and actions that her chosen does to show that they care. I won't belabor it -- I just feel that there was more potential than was explored. Ah ... but what was there was an experience to read! Makes me wish I had been Marion ....

Chris Callahan, 6101 Seminole St., Berwyn Heights, Md. 20740

The cover of #7/8 is beautiful! I've seen Karen River's work elsewhere and would love to see more in FACETS. ((The Force and Karen willing -- and she tells us she is -- you will see much more in the future)) Paulie's illo on p. 137 does a good job of getting across the idea of Luke's blindness. J.R. Dunster's Indy on p. 145 is gorgeous, almost up to River's cover. And the cartoon on p. 150 is positively evil -- I love it!

Thanks for adding the derivation of each piece after the title in the table of contents. I do that in all my zines containing something besides SW (for future reference and for the benefit of friends who borrow) but it's a lot neater in appearance when it's already printed.

Let's hear it for the STARLOG readers if that's what it took to get you back on the job!

Comments on LoCs. It's a pity Mary Jean Holmes feels it would be too disturbing to have a fanfic plotline destroyed by the next film. She's cutting herself off from a very interesting field. And the alternate story lines are sometimes as fascinating and fun as the original versions. If my own universe gets blown to shreds by ROTJ I'll be a bit upset probably, even though I fully expect that to happen, but at that point I'll simply consider mine an alternate universe and stay with it, possibly starting a new line to go with the official one. We'll see.

Speaking as Eva Oslo: to Karin Zygowicz, sorry about that -- the story was intended as an explanation of Han's problems with Jabba and a lead-in to our hero's first appearance in SW, hence the way it ended. Glad you wanted more, though. And thanks to Martynn for your kind words concerning the story and it's characterizations. As for the girl friend, I was using the film rather than the book as my source -- in the film Han comes over and sits down at the table where Ben and Luke are already seated. Thanks, also, very much, to Pam Kowalski for the lovely illo -- I was very pleased and flattered to have my first choice for artist to do that one.

On to the stories. Martie Benedict's "The Ganna II Affair" is somehow reminiscent of Brian Daley in the incidents and arrangement of them (that "porno for snakes" has *got* to be the strangest cargo Han's ever carried!) It's unlike Daley, however, in that it's well written and well paced. Hmm, come to think of it, the pacing is just about right for an hour TV show. By the way, does nerf oil smell worse than the inside of a tuantaun?

"Lesser Artifacts" by Peggy Barilla is a totally believable sequel to the implied ending of RAIDERS. Marion in the film says so little about her life with Abner, but Barilla has done a fine job of picking up on that tiny bit and extrapolating from it. The dream sequence is very well done. Altogether a worthy character study of both Indy and Marion. (And it was a white negligee, not pink.) ((Looked pink in the copy we saw.))

Thanks for reprinting Kelly's "Rainbows". I skipped it in PEGASUS 4 because I hadn't seen the film, but I try to read everything in FACETS AND I'm glad I did in this case. It's a fine study of a *human* situation, not one restricted to Vietnam vets.

Gracie Elwood's "Han and the Irate Husband" is delightful.

"I Do?" by Lindsay Nuttal is certainly original in concept.

Martie Benedict's "My Diary, 1926 A.D." is very true to the romantic 15-year-old. I found the handwriting somewhat distracting, but have to admit it helps the "diary" idea. Good character studies.

Wanda Lybarger, 2718 Edgewood Rd, Columbus, GA. 31906.

Let me start with the gorgeous cover. Karen's portrait suceeds on its own terms as art, not merely another earnestly cloned photograph. The pen work has a crispness and authority that creates modeling, not just rote approximation of a photo's values. FACETS as a cover is emerging with a "signature" look. Not merely for its standardized logo does a family resemblance show between issues: a kind of viewpoint is subtly maintained through the changing feature of different artists.

One little comment on the LoCs in passing: Some of them are getting a distinctly nasty tone. A number of people for several issues now have taken Jean Ann Berger to task. Some of the readers gave specific and pertinent reference to just what bothered them in her stories. Others left it along the lines of "her characterization stinks..." That's neither constructive critism nor valid right of comment. They may well feel so, but it still boils down to a personal opinion. If opinions are just going to get strident, I kind of wonder if the whole reason for such a forum gets lost.

Jean Ann's stories, whatever merit or lack of aside, are being criticised mainly for following right in the pulp tradition such as Lucas himself does. Also, 30's movies: if the likes of Maureen O'Hara could be spanked by John Wayne, Katherine Hepburn by Cary Grant for sufficient reasons in *story context*, and STILL be vital, strong, and intelligent women, I don't read a loss of stature for Leia. In fact in "Festival in Paradise" she turned the tables on Han when he was playing for sympathy. This time out, she's big enough to admit she's made a mistake -- something the movie Leia hasn't managed yet. The movie Leia, too, is as headstrong as she's tough. Incidentally, why should Leia know all about her galaxy? Even with hyperdrive, it's a big place. In "Festival" she's dealing with a closed world. In "Bad Case", she has to contend with a region so unknown to humans that even the slavers are unfamiliar with HER.

I enjoyed "Bad Case" and enjoyed illoing it, both for its comic light touch and for the glimpse of the tenderer side of Leia. She doesn't have to be sloppy emotional (wouldn't be in character from the movie if she were), but a softening behind the mask makes a three dimensional person out of the two dimensional SPUNKY LEADER. For myself, I saw that warmth in "Bad Case" also a playfulness often missing from SW fiction. If readers are unhappy with the less than feminist stance from those 30's movies, blame George, not Jean -- he set up the model.

Anyway, onward. Connie's pencil portrait on page 12 is yet another drawing of quite a few this issue which transcend the photographs that inspire them. Is this lady a pro? The sensativity to line, focal points, spotted textures all point to it.

The same can be said of Stephanie Hawks' Han on page 85 and the especially fine portrait on pg. 145 by an anonymous hand. I say anonymous because I can't quite make out the signature and try as I would I couldn't find a credit on the inside front cover. ((Blush. The portrait is by J.R. Dunster an exceedingly fine artist whom we won't forget to mention this issue. Sorry.))

Sounds like I'm trading strokes with Martynn after her extremely generous praise in her LoC, but I've been a fan of the lady since I got into fandom. The Ken who accompanies Kelly's reprint of her short but so poignant "Rainbows" is really nice. Please note: a background for those who've been asking; and dramatically employed, I might add, to emphasize the silouette of the action of the figure and his isolation. If we could only have one Martynn this time around, at least we got her usual winner.

Cathy Strand's cameo is a dramatic study in light and shadow. Just goes to show that in the hands of someone who can spot blacks properly, who needs line?

Carol McPherson's piece "composes" strikingly with its borders. The likenesses seem to stray a bit, but so do mine. (Sigh)

Daphne Hamilton's pieces have a lovely "spare" composition: The first one formally balanced, possessing a stillness, and oddly glistening in its penwork -- like the cold setting. But, of the two, I like best the one that accompanies "In the Silence at Midnight", both for the way it depicts so much with so little and because the crystaline quality so beautifully captures the poem's mood and sompliments it. I like the "silence" and delicacy of the poem very much and poem and illo are inextricably bound together in my mind.

Dot Sasscer's illo seems to have likenesses ever so slightly caractured, but I don't find it objectionable. Rather her art is very individual and strong. Her inside back cover, like several I have already mentioned, "interprets" a photo to go beyond it to a viewpoint.

Larry Blake's illos are also rather caractured. Sometimes, they are cartoonish enough to seem not to match the mood of the story, but this time they are very dramatic and definately compliment the action of the text.

Martie Benedict's illos have a lilt to match her lyrics. Particular favorites are the bookend illos facing on pages 142 and 143: insouciant Han indifferently studying his nails and dejected portside lady.

The cartoons are amusing, but I miss Paulie's Ken and Tommy toons. Gordon Carleton displays his usual wickedly outrageous humor joined to professional facility.

Lindsey Nuttal's poetry is frolicsome; her story, "I Do?"...hmm...well the whole idea of the avuncular colloquial restored Emperor...and his boy...got to think about that one hard. At least the light, funny tones assures me to take it in the same vein as Susan Matthews' "Don't believe it For a Minute" -- cute shaggy dog story.

More fun with "Invisible Fan". LOVED illoing that one. Eva writes the most atypical fan fiction I've ever read. They're always a bit skewed to the left of field. This one particularly has the kind of weirdly antic humor and fantasy. I love in Thorne Smith (TOPPER). Best of all, it's a complete story as opposed to some of her other pieces like "Intergalactic Colloquy" and "Welcome Aboard" which are joke vignettes.

"Man With the Child in His Eyes" takes a much-used theme, but approaches it from a fresh slant with a particularly thoughtful and novel look at who Han Solo is. This one's rather a favorite.

Marcia Wickes poetry as a group cover Kenny (with the exception of "Gestault") in much the same way: familiar themes, often used but handled with finess and compassion. she skirts pathos narrowly, and melodrama also in the case of "Conversation with Kenny" -- but she pulls it off. And there's a special poignance on the fine edge short of the ludicrous.

A talented family, the Wickes. Dianne's art, with Larry Blake's are the least photographic in the zine. One approaches them on their own terms. The rough, woodcut quality seems less successful to interpret Han or Indy in the classroom. But Indy in the field, or Ken are a marvelous match of style and character. Would like to see her interpret that other rough diamond, Tommy.

Chris' article obviously represents heavy research and careful thought. I appreciate the logical and clearly defined framework of the orfanization. If I got a little lost in all the references, many of which (to my regret), I haven't read, I do, at least, have a complete bibliography at the end to refer to.

"Lesser Artifacts" was, to me, well-written, with the scenario of the aftermath of RAIDERS perhaps sound psychology based on the realistic view of the personalities (which IS debatable). But the very naturallistically motivated plot is at odds with the flavor of the movie model. The insistant grimmness has nothing to do with the equilly (and styleized) upbeat presentation of the characters in the movie. I can't say they are out of character, but they are out of TONE. A worthy exercise in writing, but why even use the RAIDERS characters if one is going to depart so radically from the original? Why not take one's own characters through their paces?

"Eyes of a Jedi": the setting makes a strong impression in this story, so different in mood from Jean Ann's other FACETS offerings. A manhunt in an inhospitable terrain is an old device and with good reason -- it's always riveting. There is a formal balance to the movements of Fett in casual pursuit and the interplay between Han and Luke: a very ritual feel, almost a rite of passage (as, in a way, it is). The last confrontation has the feel, almost a "cosmic" arena. Strong writing but not at odds with the mood developed in EMPIRE.

Paulie's art for it: the illos on pages 124, 129, and 137, especially the very dramatic stance on 124, and the fine anatomy on 129 are among her best. Curiously, the others seem rather rushed, the likenesses not up to her usual. But for the two on 124 and 129 I'd have to flip a coin for a favorite. Fortunately, I can see them both and not have to choose.

"Ganna II" was just plain FUN. Such a completely adventurous pulp style that it was a delicious to play with. On the other hand "Diary" is a study of a relationship in a microcosm/ One is chuckling along at the adolescent sxtravagance until the disquiet of seriousness makes itself felt as an undercurrent. What humor there is at the end is sardonic. Yet the treatment isn't really out of step with the movie, which also undercuts it's extravagances with humor.

"Money" is clever and very apt. So much I wonder it hasn't been used before (or has it?) "Hey Lady is competant and effective. It's just that the theme has been done so many times that I don't appreciate more. A pity because it deserves it. "Death Defier" came as a surprise. I didn't know the accompanying illo that I did was going there. Still, I'm glad it seems to go with the action, though parenthetically. The poem is more of a summation of RAIDERS from the viewpoint of effect on the viewer. An interesting proposition, but not one that lends itself readily to effective poetry. Not a bad effort all told, though.

FACETS itself still displays the uncluttered layout and clean printing I appreciate. Aside from the cover treatment I've already commented on, this illo was beautifully served by the textured grey cover stock. Can't think of another standard stock that would have done so well. The radical difference in type for "Ganna II" was disconcerting, the fatter letter, skimpier serifs and wider word and letter-spacing made it more difficult to read in reduced form. Also an occasional departure to fit a mood and offer a natural break to prevent staleness is fine, but continual changes in format from like material, such as poetry, forces a constant change of mental gears that distracts from the content of the pieces a bit. ((Sorry, but we *can't* do the whole thing ourselves anymore and we *do* try to keep the type styles similar. Any suggestions? Any more typists with Selectrics with Prestige Elite and Light Itallic elements?))

On the other hand, really careful cutting and pasting to juxtapose illos with text, nice placement of elements, with a clean, uncluttered look to every page. Efficient use of space without a cramped feel, no mean feat with such a tight reduction.

Really nice work all told, under an impossible schedule. It's too easy to fault layout and typing and disregard the straights under which it's produced. Well, the professional attitude is, that's the job; problems under pressure aren't an excuse. BUT...ain't nobody getting paid for this. Most people in fandom hold down some other employment by nerves and fortitude. That all this is undertaken BESIDES that, is heroic and ought to be so recognized.

You done good under extreme pressure, ladies -- take a bow. ((Blush. Thanks Wanda, we needed that.))

Maggie Nowakowska, 1616 41st Ave. E #101, Seattle, WA. 98112.

Haven't been doing much LoCing lately, but I enjoyed FACETS 7/8 so much I had to drop a line. It's been a long time since I've been impelled to finish a zine, whatever the business and busy-ness of my schedule.

Martie Benedict's work was delightful and having more than one piece in the zine by her was wonderful. So often one finds a writer one likes only to never see them in print again, so for long stretches of time between showings. "The Ganna II Affair" was especially enjoyable because it had so little to do with the war; because it introduced characters one could be as interested in as the main SW character; and because it was exciting, in other words, had action and adventure. Bravo.

As to Eva's "Invisible Fan"...loved it. The mixture of humor and pathos was perfect. I especially appreciated Han's reaction to discovering that Terrans believe they're the only ones out here. His vertigo was a touch of realism that is often missing from stories like this one. It isn't easy to keep a cross-universe type story from being totally ridiculous, or at least, 'distant' from one's perception of reality. However, Eva manages to make the tale believeable... sort of.

"I Do?" and "Happily Ever After" were also well handled, however different their basic point of views. I have to admit my personal humor leads to the latter; for all the farcical notions in the story, I could see the situation ending up that way...

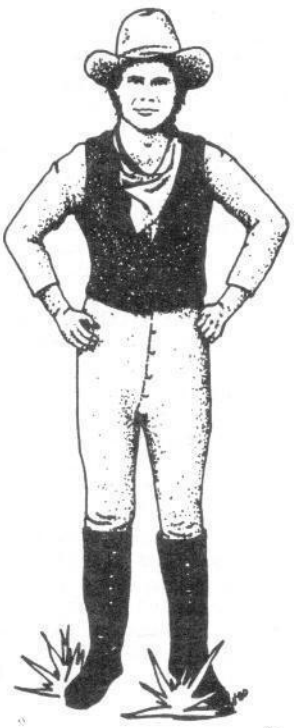
To the other two SW stories: "Partners" has a lot going for it (esp. the illos. Keep Larry Blake, too). I felt that the drumming out scene was bit over done -- the additional theatrics aren't necessary if you're stripping a guy in front of his peers. A case where 'simplicity' works best, I think. "Eyes of a Jedi" was a good story, too. I would argue that the Luke we saw in TESB could not be the Luke that appears in this story since TESB Luke does not seem to be as advanced in understanding his forceful powers, but perhaps the story was written before the movie.

I found the illos interesting since they pointed up a problem for illustrators that existed in ST fandom with Leonard Nimoy and even more so in SW with Harrison Ford, aka the Cameleon. It is very difficult to come up with a proper Han Solo face if you are using a Ford picture as a reference or a picture of any of the other Ford characters. For all the basic similarities, all the characters are different. Indy does not look like Han who does not look like Kenny or Falfa, etc. A couple of the pictures in this story got me thinking this and I would like to hear other artist's comments. As a reader, I would rather see illos that are less representational of Han than illos that portray Han looking like Harrison or Indy.

Your Indiana Jones selection was amazing. "Lesser Artifacts" outlines a future I can easily see for Indy and Marion. Ah, "My Diary", Ah... okay, I accept it that some fifteen-year-olds are that knowledgable. I have to, Marti has done a fine job with "Diary". I guess I was just a very backward fifteen-year-old...sigh. Really, a fine story and it would have to be to overcome prejudices in this area. Dumb, I was quite dumb in those days...

About Chris Callahan's essay...love seeing this kind of work in fandom. If her presentation of the data in my stories is any measure, she did well by everyone. One of the reasons I am in fandom is to learn other folk's impressions. More, please, more.

Oh, this might insert earlier in the art discussion (oops); the inside back cover picture and the picture on page 145 are good examples of differences in one man's face between characters. Almost the same pose and yet one is definately Indy and the other is definitely Han.



Janice Bratton, 59 Wisconsin, Hamilton, Ohio, 45011.

I am one of those 300+ people who responded to the FACETS ad in STARLOG. I, like many, of the others, had never even heard the word "fanzine" before, much less knew what one was! I was also new to STARLOG, having purchased my first issue only because there was an HF interview in it. Reading STARLOG fot the first time proved to be a bit mystifying -- and still is at times after 7 issues and a few back issues! The editor and writers assume that all of the fan jargon, SF terminology and abbreviations used are already known to the readers. Well, yes -- perhaps to most of them, but how about the new SF fans? ((Why don't you drop STARLOG a line and *tell* them this?))

I'm happy to say that I received #7/8 within a week of ordering it. ((You're one of the lucky ones)) Love that fast service -- wish I could say the same for most of the other fanzines. I was thrilled with the contents because: There were no "trash Leia" stories in it. Nowhere did she get her comeuppance resulting from behavior that more resembled that of a child than that of a dedicated Rebel leader and experienced diplomat. Nor was she manhandled by a brutish Han Solo.

The Han-Leia conversations are more along the lines of SW & TESB -- an affable repartee rather than a verbal interchange full of rancor and spite.

OHMYGOD! There aren't any stories where Han uses the word "ain't" everytime he opens his mouth. And I don't recall him using even one double negative! Han's grammar is every bit as good as Luke's in TESB. I'll never understand why so many fan writers insist on making Han's speech border on the illiterate! Han doesn't use poor grammar as a rule; he only uses it *for effect*.

I wasn't thrilled with a few of the selections because Han is always shouting or yelling at people. Again, many fan writers seem to thing that Han is a real loudmouth who must always shout to get his point across. I can't figure out where in the world this idea came from -- surely not from the movies or the books. Han is the argumentative type, but he never attempts to win an agrument by out-shouting his opponent!

LoCs -- I love them, but they drive me nuts. There's always some reference to a story, author or fanzine (DAMN those out-of-print zines that I can't get my hands on!) that I don't know about and/or can't get. So imagine how crazy it made me to read "The Many Faces of Han Solo". I know, it's my tough luck for not discovering SW, TESB, HF, and fanzines sooner! If anybody has those zines listed in the bibliography and wants to sell 'em, *I'm* a buyer! ((Why not drop Lori Carleton a SASE for her list of out-of-print zines she can xerox for you?))

Now, I'm really not wild about poetry, generally speaking. The only one that really grabbed my attention in #6 was Susan Matthews "Westron Wynde". I thought it was beautiful. However, this issues doen't have even one poem that I don't like! They're all terrific. My favorite is "Coda" by Martie Benedict ((if you like the poetic version you'll *love* the ballad check Martie's ad for info)) followed *very* closely by "In the Silence at Midnight" by Marcia Brin. "The Man With the Child in His Eyes" by Karen Miller, "Hey Lady" by Jan Gaut, and "History" by Kathy Percy. This is the first fanzine I've read where I actually liked all of the poetry -- I'm amazed. Keep after those gals for MORE!

"The Ganna II Affair" -- great! So often in fanfiction, "new" characters that authors write into a story are either pointless or just plain boring. *Not so* with Ben and Trella and I

certainly like Martie's Han! I was also pleasantly surprised to find that Solo didn't "get the girl". How unusual and *NICE*, for a change. Martie has also done a better-than -average job of including Chewie in the action (and he even gets some line in the dialogue!), which really warms the cockles of my heart. After all, Chewie is the most important, um, sentient being in Han's life and as such should be an important figure in most Han Solo stories.

"Rainbows" -- I'm getting to like Ken Boyd more and more, but he'll never be my favorite HF caracter. I've read the book but have not seen the movie. Perhaps seeing HF as Kenny would make a difference, who knows? ((ain't no doubt about it -- it would)) I do like your style, though, Kelly.

"The Invisible Fan" -- Wonderful! I thoroughly enjoyed it. Poor Harrison!

"I Do?" This was fun -- not *believeable* but fun nevertheless. Han, a prince? *Nah!* I did *so* like that "Scum and Villainy" sign, as well as the Emperor's sense of humor.

"Partners" -- I liked this, though on my first reading I was a bit confused as to exactally what Han had done to warrant a courtmartial. I read it again and I think it defintiely needs a much more detailed explaination. Also, I prefer to think of Han and Chewie getting together either before or during the events leading up to Han's courtmartial, as alluded to in Daley's HS AT STAR'S END.

"Eyes of a Jedi" -- this is my favorite story from #7/8. The story was excellent, as were the characterizations. (one question, though,Han becomes disoriented in the sandstorm and has no idea what direction he's headed, so Luke directs them. I thought Corellians couldn't get lost, so what happened to Solo's famous sense of direction?) I really liked this Han Solo, probably because Leia wasn't in the story. I don't usually like J.A. Berger's Han because of the way he tends to act around Princess Leia. Once the Princess enters the picture, Han becomes totally unrecognizable to me -- a raging, loudmouthed, maniacal brute with a definate malicious streak! I much prefer the "Eyes" Han, Jean Ann! Again, a *terrific* story!

"Lesser Artifacts" -- disappointing. RAIDERS was lighthearted escapism and I would like to see RAIDERS fiction continue in that vein. I don't want to read about a troubled Indy and Marion and their failing marraige. That brings these characters down to the ordinary when they should be extraordinary, as they were in the movie. If Marion can't remain an interesting person and an exciting part of Indy's life, I'd rather not see her in the story at all.

"Happily Ever After" -- I didn't like this at all. It made Han appear uncouth and worse, idiotic! Han was a laughing stock and Leia living with Han for ten years without the "benefit" of marriage? Never. Leia requires commitment in a relationship and I think that Han would readily give it to hee, once he was sure he couldn't be happy living without her.

"My Diary, 1926 A.D." -- now this I liked. Sounded like a 15-year-old Marion (especially that last line!). Sounded like a young Indy. Good! Liked the "whip scene". (Very erotic!)

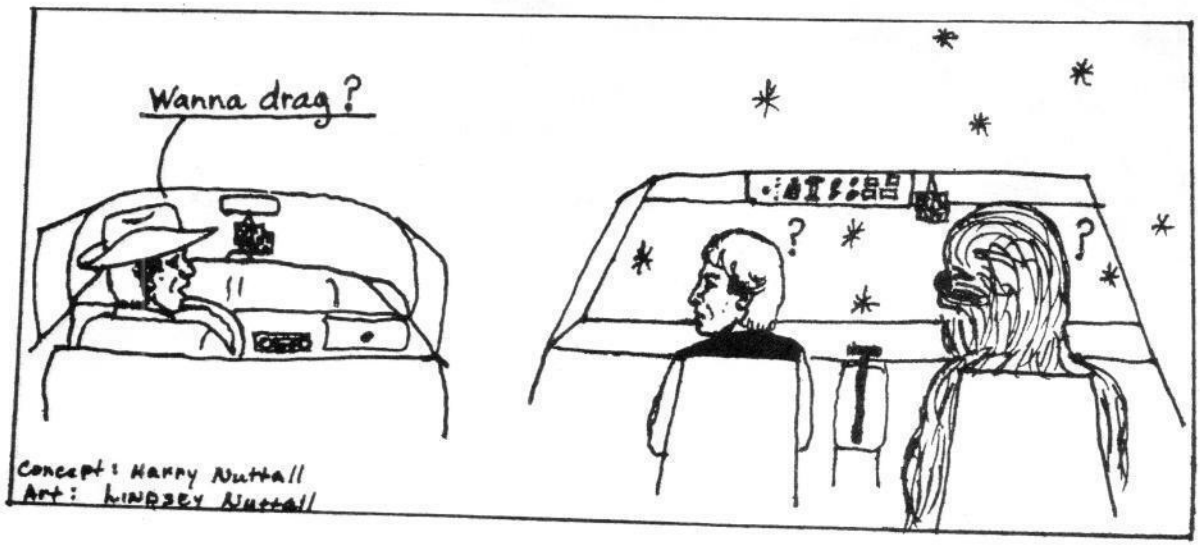
Art: -- anytime Martynn only has one illo in the zine, it's a big disappoinment. She's the BEST! Here's what else I liked; Karen River's cover, all of Wanda Lybarger's illos, pg. 85 -- Stephanie Hawks, pg. 141, 142, 143 -- Martie Benedict & pg. 145 J. R. Dunster. I didn't like the illustrations for "Lesser Artifacts" and "I Do?" Sorry. Personal taste, I guess.

Well, so ends my first LoC to FACETS. Do you really like to hear all those personal opinions? ((You bet we do and so do the writers and artists. Pat us on the head, or kick us in the butt, but *TALK* to us. Your opinion is *important!*)) You gals put out a first-class fanzine not to mention the great service you supply for all of us HF fans. If we can't watch him all the time, at least we can read stories and poems about the characters he creates.

Juanita Salicrup; 61 Union Pl. Lynbrook, NY. 11563.

I want to thank you for the copy of your guidelines for contributers. I think they're terrific -- very much needed and very sane. I was particularly drawn to the "Thou shalt agree to be edited." Bravo! It's about time someone said it right out in print. Me -- I'm naive enough to assume that anyone who submitted a story to an editor knew that editing was part of the process she (or he) might face, but a little experience in fandom has taught me otherwise. Where people got the idea that their sacred words were etched in granite I don't really know, but I think it's about time that someone disabused them of the notion. (Of course, to be fair about it, there are a great many of so-called "editors" running around who haven't the most basic grasp of what editing is all about either. As someone who has spent the past 18 years of her professional life as a writer and editor for a corporation, I get to see both sides and it's not happiness either way...sometimes.)

Your "Thou shalt not create a Mary Sue" really was wonderful! Hurrah! But your "explanation" seemed to be a case of the six blind men and the elephant. Thinking about it, I decided that maybe it's easier to say what a Mary Sue is *not*. It's *not* (Alas!) a story with a well-developed, reasonable and entirely *human* female character involved in a valid emotional situation with the hero wherein the relationship has a ring of truth to it. I love romantic stories as much as the next person -- perhaps more, since I've written several ST stories that can only be described as "romantic". But my personal beef with MS stories (as well as with a dismaying number of *other* fan stories where there is a major female character) is with the depiction of the female in question. All too many fan writers to themselves a disservice as both women and writers and, by extension, do a similar disservice to *all* women in writing the female as nitwitted or hardcase (i.e. "imitation men") or impossibly bitchy (a common failing of entirely too many fan depictions of Leia) or so impossibly virtuous/capable/beautiful/intelligent/etc. that said female characters slip over the edge and land in the realm of complete unreality. I wish they would learn to use *real* women as examples and begin to write stories with real women in them. God knows it would make for stories that were a hell of a lot more interesting to read! I feel like asking them if they've ever seen, heard or read of. or known a woman they admired -- but I'm afraid I'd only be opening up a particularly ugly can of worms. Ah, well. What makes me particularly sad about it is that, given such strong, well defined men as Han Solo, Indiana Jones, etc., there is an even greater need for strong female characters. (No, Gladys, I do *not* mean females sporting a blaster, bull whip and a three day growth of beard!) Just as any good story depends on the chemestry and contretemps between a strong protagonist and an equally strong antagonist or else it blathers off into hero-versus-paper-tiger, so do stories with strong men call for strong women to create real sparks. And, while it is true that there have always been women who could and did pick up a gun or whip as necessary while they managed to stay recognizably female, it is even truer that many women have strengths which are *not* defined by musculature. And *those* are the ones *never* seen in Mary Sue stories -- and all too seldom seen at all in fan stories of any kind.



You know when you've had a long day.
Certain things don't seem to go your way.
Well, if that's the case, do yourself a favor
Keep in stock, plenty of liquid paper!
Dedicated to all zine artists

Cherie Abell

The Wandering Heart

I love you,
But you love the bird
Who soars on wings of silver.
I can offer only the human things;
Love, and laughter, and tears,
But she can offer;
Galaxies and novas and stardust.
She sings the song of the spheres,
And rocks you on the winds of space.
With her you are a comet,
A meteor, a wandering star.
You live in the velvet dark of space,
And reach out to touch infinity.
You are a wandering heart,
And you love me,
But you love her more,
And,
I understand.

Jane Firmstone-Rafferty

In the Cockpit

A kiss on the cheek
I smile, but you don't see
And Chewie's back in the main cabin,
Just as well.
Flyboy, nerf-herder, scoundrel
All names you've called me.
Each a little more personal,
Each a stage in our relationship.
Trouble?
Yes, I've bought it now!
Falling in love with a princess!
The old man would say it's the Force working.
Hell, I don't know! Maybe it is.
All I do know
Is that your touch and your sarcastic comments
Make me smile,
Rouse emotions that I thought died a long time ago on Corellia.

Karen

Weikert

Indiana, Where You Been?

Wanda Lybarger

illustrated by Cherie Abell

Since the trend of the past decade and a half has been for actors to take themselves very seriously, audience involvement has diminished in proportion. To clarify the point, I make a distinction between an actor being serious about his craft, with a commitment to the work at hand, and an actor being self-indulgent about being *taken* seriously as an ACTOR (preferably by critics). Much has been made of the actor as chameleon, the submergence of self into as diverse a collection of parts as possible. We are meant to admire versitility; it has become a fetish. We go and admire skill in technique and sit admiring that technique rather than become engrossed in the character in the storyline. Strangely, we are moved only on occasion--and then it is a triumph of the material rather than the personality. We have lost track of actors who invested our emotions in and of themselves. We admire our actors, but we don't love them. They are oddly diminished beings.

The "Golden Age" of movies boasted a pantheon of demi-gods who suited the medium of film. That some of them were also presences to be reckoned with on a stage was irrelevant to their mystique on screen. They were larger-than-life, contained hermetically in a story unfolding in a darkened theater as a stage actor never quite removed from his audience. They drew us to *them*. They were our guides through a world functioning a part which we observed. Our immediate involvement with them was vital to sweeping us into the story. Lacking the interaction of physical presence (as on stage), they depended on our instant recognition of them to make the essential contact. That they loomed over us from a huge screen, somehow magical, turned them into archetypes, mythic in their power and so potent in their chemistry that they retain their grip on our imaginations--long after the stale, even riseable technique of a former day has been superceded by others.

It seems left to the film historians, returning with fresh insight at this remove in time, to notice the actual subtlety of their skills. Each represents a triumph of the individual within set conventions--like Japanese Kabuki. Archetypes are personalities in digest form, distilled essences which resonate with our subliminal recognition, elegant and self-contained as Haiku.

Harrison Ford, on the strength of those roles in STAR WARS, THE EMPIRE STRIKES BACK, and now, RAIDERS OF THE LOST ARK, in which he was permitted to make his own contributions, exhibits a near-clairvoyant feel for the requirements of a role--to individualize and particularize it. He takes what could be a cardboard cutout and pulls the neat trick of making him at once larger-than-life and a real individual. Amid a sudden wave of comic book heroes, Ford is the only one who has gotten in tune with the material. He gets away with playing it straight without being laughable. Nor does he succumb to the temptation to protect himself by laughing along with the audience at the material. It takes artistic courage to lay your professional ego on the line and risk being a joke. It's precisely that kind of integrity that pulls it off. He doesn't play it safe in trying to have it both ways. The men of action he portrays are gutsy types, and they ring true through the most outrageous plot developments because the audience can subliminally appreciate that the guts are real--he is taking risks as an actor with the same kind of consistency and total involvement with the business at hand as the characters he inhabits.

He succeeds in rivetting our attention and in claiming our concern because he turns the conventional figure into an individual. As he does so, he gives the impression that he isn't playing to the audience. They must come to him because his character is inhabiting the world of the story, totally unself-conscious. That kind of indifference to observation goes a long way toward convincing an audience that the plot is actually unfolding. In the worst movies he has been in, no matter how prepostorous the plotline, when he is in the scene the audience can, in some measure, feel that sense of peering through an invisible wall, eavesdropping on another dimension.

Whether he works into a character starting from the inside or outside, the result is a *person*, embodying the Archetype. He has an intuitive sense of the medium--the unforced naturalness and 'rightness' of his body language and 'business' is so carefully varied and so subtle it all but goes unnoticed. Simply, there is a subliminal realization that Han Solo and Indiana Jones might be brothers under the skin but are not the same person. The body language, expressions, timing, little touches of reality (he makes serendipity work for him as when he almost trips over the barbed wire near the map room in "ARK"); all these convince an audience they're watching a living, spontaneous person. As a result, the charisma is real; he isn't tailoring the effect with one eye on the reactions of an invisible viewer. Finally, with Indiana Jones, he has a role where these talents are very obviously on display. Care, skill and sympathy for the material has been put into "RAIDERS" by all concerned, and due nod is for Lucas' and Spielberg's felicitous collaboration. But the whole lovely house of cards could have collapsed with the wrong cast. It would have been just another faintly embarrassing exercise in a comic strip, the values of an earlier period made the stuff of condescending humor.

This danger also existed for the STAR WARS saga and was avoided by a largely unsung cast. Finally, Harrison Ford has the opportunity to personally make or break a film. That kind of unequivocal responsibility, successfully met, creates STARS.

COPIED
by
Cherie
Abell
10/8/81

A miniscule number of critics claim he "loses himself in the role," is "upstaged by the effects", or "lacks the screen presence of...even a James Brolin." It's difficult to see how he could have been "upstaged by effects" which occur in the last ten minutes of the movie when he'd been carrying the gripped attention of the audience for the other hour and three quarters. Also, simply because he fine tunes his performance to the dynamics of the material, it's hard to take seriously the view that he "loses himself". He never really loses touch with an emerging screen persona; he is already a master of the variation on a theme. So far his demonstrated quality has been to approach roles superficially similar and avoid both cliche and monotony by an intuitive regard for the sublte individualities.

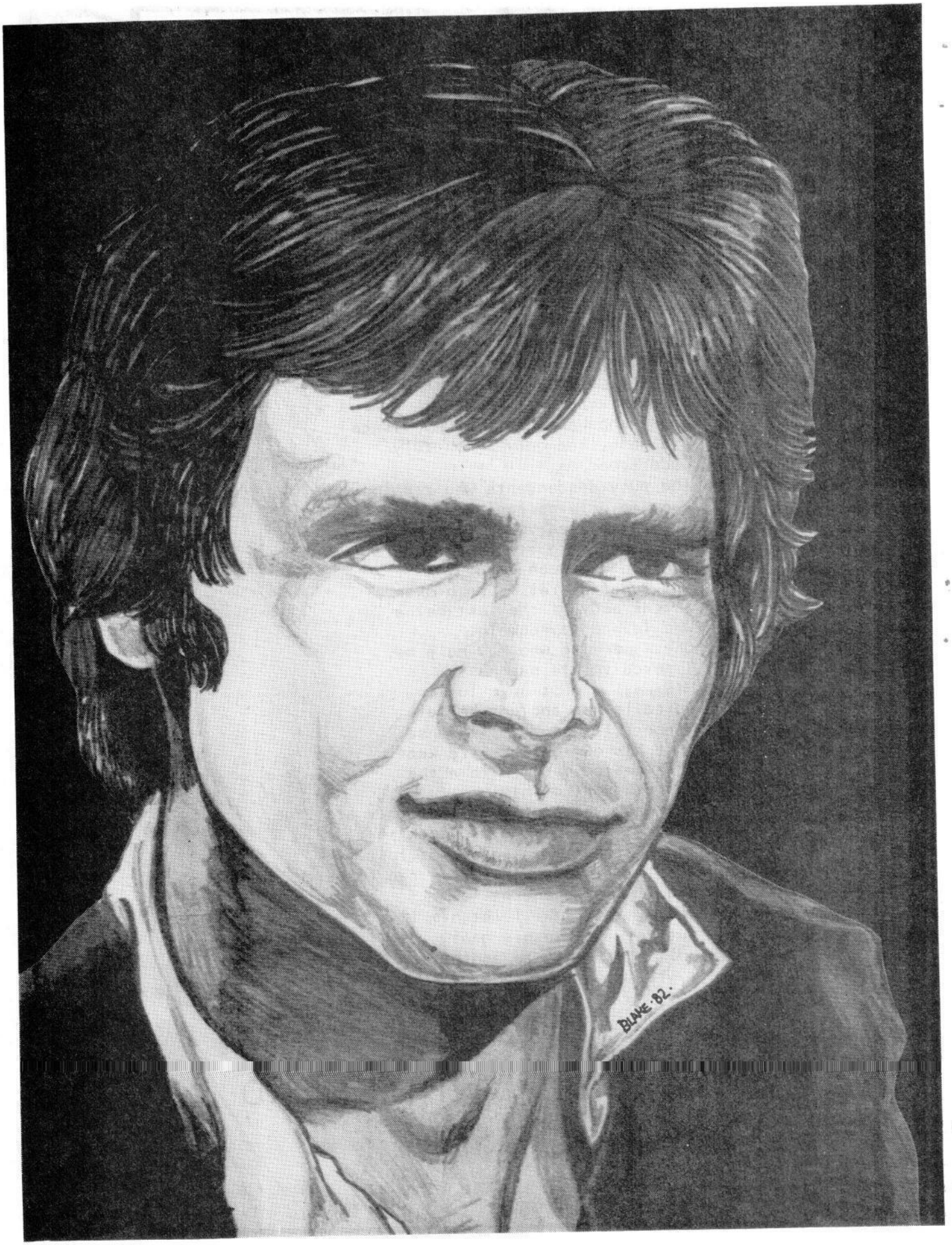
The only apparent reason for including James Brolin in a list of charismatic personalities seems to be on the strength of his impersonating Clark Gable. That's tatamount to preferring cannibalism. Brolin had no such screen persona rather than one borrowed from the man who embodied it. Any charisma was reflected in a single role. They're right to go to Bogart and John Wayne for comparisons with Ford, not because his screen person is imitative, but because they have to go that far back to find a star with that kind of charisma--the instant recognition of an image of a universal type. He echoes those older heroes without aping one. Rather than a stale, foredoomed attempt to pattern himself after what is already a distilled essence, he taps instead, the same wellspring that formed the original personas of those stars. He brings a fresh outlook, blended from those universal sources and his own unique chemistry.

These same critics seem actively to sneer that he doesn't take an Actor's Studio approach, and disregard or fail to appreciate the actual subtlety by which he transcends conventions. These are the critics who, years hence, will, with an air of discovery, conduct learned studies on his craftsmanship, bemoaning that he was underrated in his time. The likes of Rex Reed dismisses him as a bad actor because he doesn't flesh out his characters in a manner noticeably in the current technical fashion. Such people host retrospectives on the long-gone stars, eulogize a naturalism that transcends fashion in acting technique. Such are the people who sneer at the rebirth of such stars in their midst. They can't observe except at the remove of time. Their applause is all for the past, but we can be pleased to note the re-emergence of a STAR in all the old and best senses of the term. Glad to have you back, Indiana, you've been gone far too long.

GODDESS

I have been trapped in this place
for a long time
bound both by memories
and the golden image which was made
in my likeness.
Those who have captured my visage
are gone, and only they truly
understood me.
The puny descendants who remain
know me only as legend:
a thing to fear.
They have forgotten the rituals.
The bond between Natural
and Supernatural is as broken
as the body of the last being
who invaded my domain.
One is coming who may help me,
I perceive his nearness.
His ways are strange to me:
he calls the ancient beliefs
"Superstitions," yet I sense
that his own beliefs are kept
in a sealed vault within the
deepest part of him.
He fears the knowledge that they are true.
I will teach him not to mock--
my powers are weakened, not lost.
When my likeness is gone I can leave this place,
and find my peace at last.
In payment, I will let him live,
but he will win his goal
only to lose it to another.
I will enjoy the sport.

CATHIE WHITEHEAD


BLAKE·82.

CORELLIANS

I never cared much for Corellians.
They're an independent lot.
A little too independent for my taste
And more than a little rough
around the edges.
Then I met this Corellian.
Han Solo was his name.
Oh, he was a Corellian all right.
You could see it in his walk
and the glint in his eye
and that casual disregard of authority.
A smuggler, a spacer,
With a battered freighter he called
the Millennium Falcon.
She didn't look like much
but she had it where it counted.
Or so he told me anyway.
I believed him.
She fit his style.
Those days with him were good.
The nights even better.
He taught me a lot.
Not just about Corellians
But about myself too.
He's gone now, of course.
Corellians never stay long in one place.
I think about him often
up there among the stars.
I wish he could have stayed.
But then he wouldn't have been Corellian
And it wouldn't have been the same.

KARIN ZYGOWICZ

RAIDERS OF THE LOST ORC

Martie Benedict

illustrated by Gordon Carleton

You want something done right, get a professional. Sauron the Base, erstwhile Dark Lord of Mordor, and since his resounding defeat on the slopes of Orodruin, wherein his Ring was forcibly removed, know as "Old Four Fingers," was becoming fond of that bit of wisdom, and flagellating himself in the privacy of his thoughts as he dwelt upon his misfortunes, he began, upon a time to see a light at the end of his exhilic tunnel.

There being no particular rush, this Master of Evil set out on a leisurely search across the Time Lines and Dimensional Indices for a Treasure Hunter with impeccable credentials, a Professional with wit, cunning and imagination. A resourceful man. A tenacious man!

It was slow going for Sauron, but at last he thought he'd found the one he wanted.

Although contacting this would-be retriever of Rings seemed to present an insuperable problem, for a Mighty Wizard, even a temporarily vanquished one, very little is eventually impossible...

Prof. Indiana Jones, Ph.D., B.S., M.A., etc., Archeology Department, Marshall College, was occupying a seat at one of the teacher's tables in the cafeteria. Before him was a scholarly journal containing an article by Rene Belloq, and a bowl of vegetable soup, the former engrossing him far more than the latter.

After a bit Jones flipped the magazine shut with an expression of contempt and turned his attention to lunch. He smiled slightly. By some coincidence the letters in the center of the bowl had formed his name. He stirred the rapidly cooling soup and the name vanished...only to immediately reappear, a little floating monogram on a tomato sea. He blinked, stirred again. JONES, said his soup.

Indiana Jones was, above all, a pragmatist.

"Okay, I'm Jones," the professor said to the bowl.

The letters broke up and reformed. "Got a job," indicated his lunch.

"Sure, I got a job," he replied frowning, "I teach."

"No, no, I got a job..."

"Well, congratulations, friend..."

"...for you."

Indiana peered at the macaroni message through oversized spectacles. "For me?"

"You got it fella," the soup replied.

"Right," he responded after a moment. "And, who are you, with a job for me?"

"The name's Sauron. It means 'lizard'. So you can call me 'Snake' if you want. Lot of the guys do."

"How about if I call you Sauron?"

"Whatever. Say, you ARE the Indiana Jones I'm looking for, aren't you? Six foot, well-built, ruggedly handsome?"

"You can't tell?"

"This bowl look like an eye to you?"

"Guess not."

"So are you the treasure hunting Jones, seeker after lost relics? Antiquarian?"

"Yeah, that's me all right, but..."

"Then I have a QUEST for you, Jones." Somehow the little macaroni letters managed to achieve portentiousness.

Indiana mulled that over for a moment. "What," said he, "is a bowl of soup doing employing treasure hunters?"

The letters formed rapidly and precisely. "Jones, I am not a bowl of soup. I am a Lord of Darkness. I rule, or will rule, a vast world separate and different from your own. This is not a game."

"O.K., don't get hostile. Tell me, where is this vast world of yours?"

"That's a little difficult to explain, dimension-wise..."

"Are we talking...uh..." Indy thought quickly, "Buck Rogers?"

"Wellllll..." the soup hedged, "Kinda. Actually it's more like H.G. Wells."

"And how do I get there?"

"Now THAT'S more like Buck Rogers."

Despite himself, and beyond his bewilderment, Jones was intrigued. "What exactly is it you want me to go after?"

"Ring."

"There's your phone."

"Ha. Ha. That's a good one, Jones. A ring, a little keepsake, you know, inscribed."

"What's it say?"

"Mushy stuff. Wouldn't interest you."

"How did you come to lose it?"

"Elves. Damn Elves ripped me off."

"The Elves took it, huh?" Jones' mobile mouth quirked at one corner. "Some Elves you got."

"Listen, Chuck! I'll give you Elves! Seven foot tall, every one of them and no sense of humor at all! Great big tax accountants. Listen, you find 'em and rescue that Ring - get my FINGER back! On second thought, never mind. GIVE 'em the finger. Elves! God!"

Indiana was astonished at the amount of verbiage a bowl of Campbells could provide...all the little barley-pearl punctuation... "O.K. Elves. Anyone else I have to look out for?"

"Bunch of sword-swinging yahoos...you pack some heat?"

"Smith and Wesson .45."

"Good! Won't have any problem with swordsmen then. So when can you leave?"

Indiana paused in surprise. The question made it all seem suddenly quite real. "Well, I don't know..." he replied slowly.

Marcus could restrain himself no longer. He took the two steps that separated him from the cafeteria table and Jones' back. "Indiana, whatever are you doing?"

"Holy shit, Marcus! You damn near scared me to death!"

"Indiana, you've been talking to your soup."

"Marcus, look," Jones was excited. "I've been communicating with someone from another world..."

Marcus' gentle brown eyes poured out compassion upon his friend and fellow-educator. "Of course, Indiana."

"No, really, Marcus. Listen to me! Another dimension! He wants me to go after a lost treasure, and...you don't believe me, do you?"

Marcus eyed the archeologist sadly.

"Well, look! Look right here! He's been spelling out messages in the soup..."

Both men stared at the bright surface of the bowl. It said SPAGRMALIK.

"Indiana, do come away for a bit, there's a good fellow." Gently he helped the bewildered professor to his feet.

"But...but..."

"Now, Indiana, I want you to take the afternoon off. Go home, relax. Take a nap, perhaps. You've been working very hard lately."

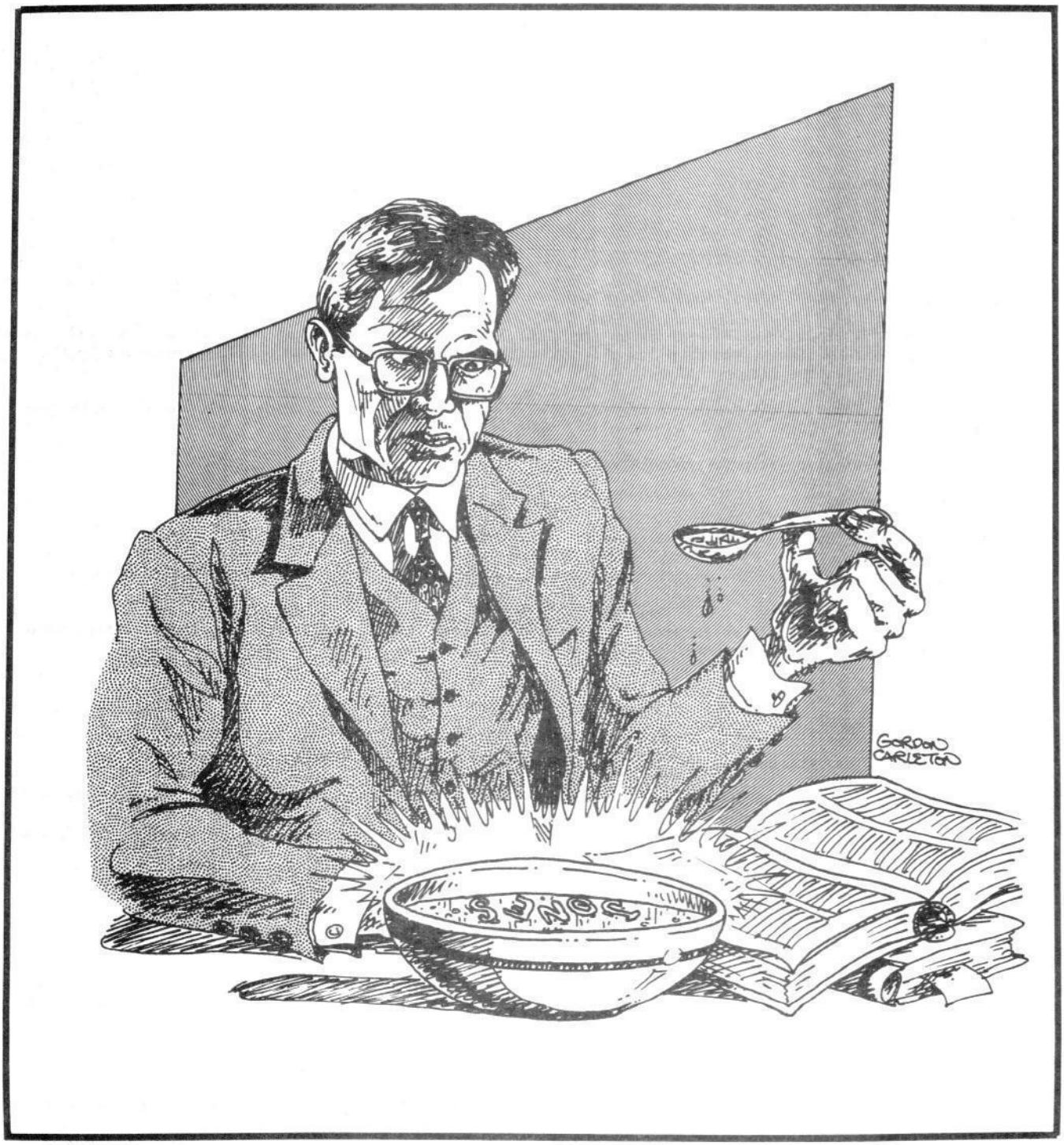
Indiana frowned at Marcus, perplexed, kneaded his forehead. "But it seemed so real!" He peered at the bowl in puzzlement. A sturdy porcelain receptacle it was, containing an unremarkable vegetable brew.

"Yeah, maybe you're right, Marcus," he sighed. He removed his glasses, peered through them, reset them and took one more half-hopeful look. IPAGRMLCZIK, offered the soup. "Marcus, I think I'll have a drink, then take a nap."

"Right, Indiana!" said Marcus jovially. "Run along now. Do you good." He nodded encouragement and smiled, then 'tsked' sadly to himself as he watched his friend walk slowly away. Lad HAD been off his feed he thought. He looked down at Indy's cold, uneaten lunch.

"Fuck you," said the soup.

"Snake," said Marcus, "behave yourself."



Mahmoud's Truck Rental
Street of the Camel
Cairo, Egypt
1st October, 1936

Acme Motor Corp., Ltd.
72 Wood Street
London, England S.W.3

Effendi:

I am writing this letter because I feel I have a legitimate complaint. I recently leased a truck to a group of archeologists who have assured me that it was only used on one occasion, and that was to transport a valuable artifact. When the vehicle was returned I found the following damages:

1. Hood ornament broken off completely.
2. Canvas cover torn.
3. Multiple dents and scratches on both sides of the chassis.
4. Portions of grill missing, and those pieces remaining bent and mangled beyond repair.
5. Right door missing.
6. Windscreen missing.

I must confess this last item has me truly worried, for I found what might be bloodstains on the front seat and I fear that when the windscreen shattered someone may have been injured. I have a small business and cannot afford a lawsuit. If your product cannot even withstand the mild intellectual pursuit of Archeology, I shudder to think what might have happened had it been subjected to real road stress.

I trust we can reach an amicable settlement of this matter. I am hoping to hear from you soon.

Yours,

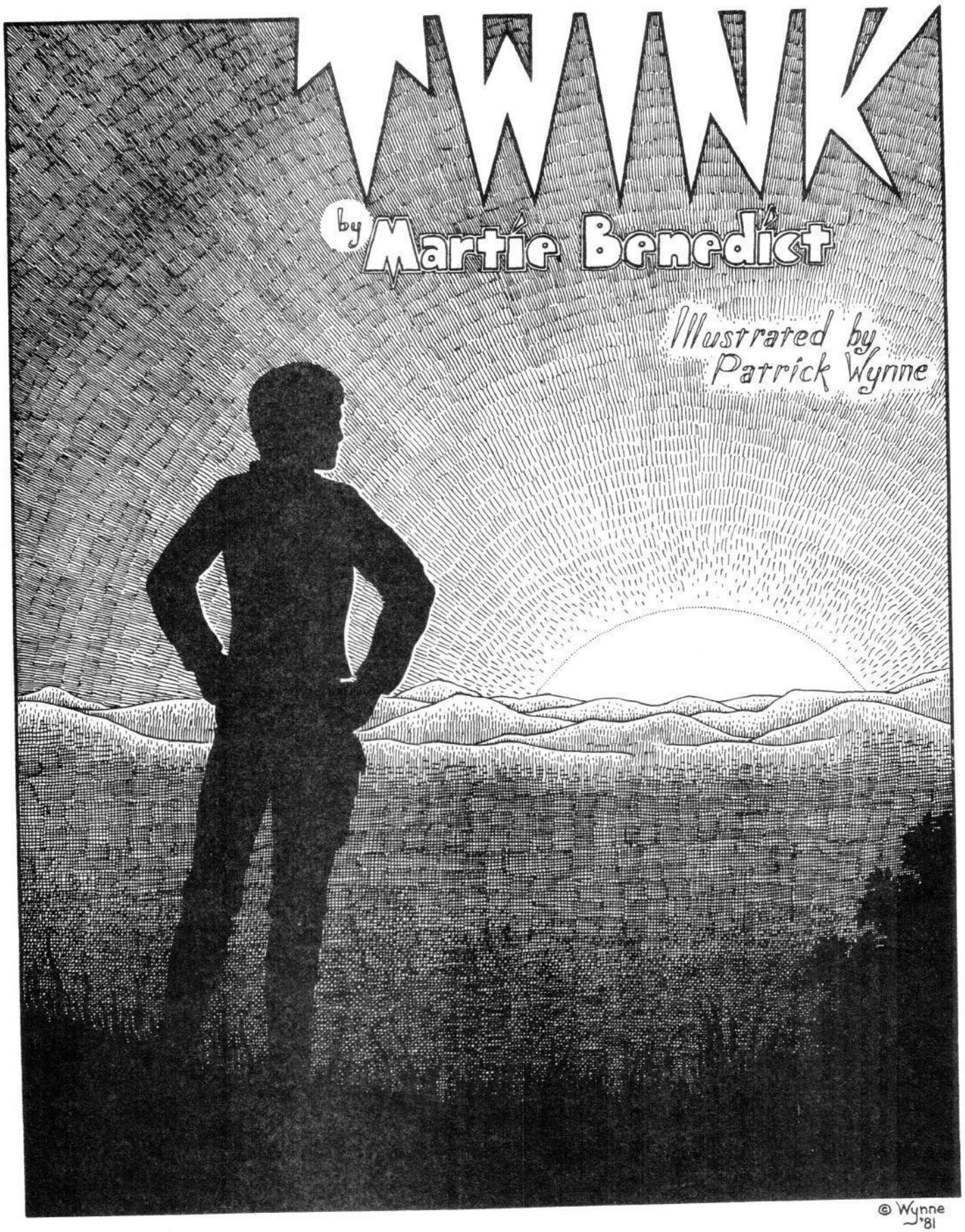
Hassim Mahmoud

Lybarger '81

KENNY

I know what they're all sayin'--hell,
I'd say it too. It's just as well
That you don't love this boy no more;
At least not like you did, before.
You see these hands? They're big, too strong,
And they was gentle. Ain't it wrong?
I almost wish I'd been born small,
'Cause now my soul can't stand as tall
As this big body. I know why
You're here. You ever see men die
And know they fell because a' you?
Then don't tell me that it ain't true,
What town folks say about me. See,
I just ain't what I used to be.
Why don't you say the word? I can.
I'm crazy since I served in 'Nam!
Now, go on home. My trailer's fine.
Yeah, it ain't much but still it's mine.
I know you'll do what I ain't yet--
Forget, sweetheart. Forget. Forget.

Marcia
Wickes


WWWK
by Martie Benedict
Illustrated by
Patrick Wynne
© Wynne
'81

On civilized worlds it was the hour when the big gear-down for an evenings excitement would begin. But Krinto was not civilized, not so Han Solo could notice. He stood several meters out from the ellipsoid shadow of his ship, hands on hips, watching the magnified disk of Krinto's primary submerge behind a line of low hills and wishing himself about a parsec distant--in any direction.

Glancing up over his left shoulder, he tried to make out the furred form of his co-pilot at the cockpit controls, but the sunset glow painted a pastel reflection on the transparisteel facets of the canopy, artistically opaquing themthem. Solo knew the Wookiee was there, though, mounting vigil, patiently manning the auxiliaries that controlled the servos for the quad guns that gave the starship *Millennium Falcon* her defensive capability.

The sun disappeared behind the black hills. Solo shivered as a chill dusk wind rippled the tall grass. His age was difficult to tell. No longer a youth, there was about him a sense of motion and acute attention to his surroundings that gave him a preditory air, softened occasionally by a wry smile that sometimes reached his eyes. He was a bit over medium height, lean and handsome in an off-hand way. He was also one of the fastest gunmen in the very big galaxy.

Presently he turned and headed back towards his ship, the breeze plucking at his shirtsleeves.

The *Falcon* rested on her tripod landing gear just clear of a copse of gnarled whipthorn trees which acted as a windbreak of sorts. Over the whine and slash of their long barbed vines, Solo suddenly heard the low thrumming of a powered craft. Its approach was masked by the whipthorm symphony, it was almost on him before he realized it. Whirling, he dropped to one knee in the sheltering overhang of his ship, pulling his blaster free of its holster and scanning the darkening horizon for running lights.

The small cargo lifter came in from the shouth, a dark smear against the cobalt sky. The cacaphonous whipthorn forest at dusk for a rendezvous. Solo's naturally sharp senses heightened and his muscles flowed in an instinctive defensive alignment.

While he watched, the lifter settled onto the grass nearby. Once down, her hull lights flashed briefly in a pre-arranged signal.

Solo cupped the comlink he carried against his cheek "Chewie, keep extra sharp. I've got a feeling about this one." Something in the air did not feel right, an invisible factor, a wild card in the game he was about to play.

A dark shape separated itself from the side of the lifter, swung out and down -- a boarding ramp -- followed by a man-high form. Even in the dimness Solo could see the hand held away from the body, apparently empty. He moved out from beneath the *Falcon's* starboard bow mandible, straightened, and holstered his weapon, though he left the retaining strap loose.

A figure from the lifter approached. A voice hailed him, sounding metallic as it was filtered through a vocoder. Not a human, then. "Solo?"

"I'm Solo."

"Have you brought the consignment??

"No other reason I'd be here."

"We'll make the transfer on grav-sleds, agreed?"

The shadowy figure had halted, oddly, off to one side of the *Falcon*. Nerves tense, Han felt the sense of not-right growing more pronounced. Chewie must have felt the same thing, for Han heard a whine as servos swung the belly turrets to cover the stranger. Topside guns remained silently trained on the cargo lifter.

Vocoders conveyed a scant range of emotions, but this one managed a touch of anger as the alien responded, "I'm not armed!" He held up a splayed- fingered hand and waved it stiffly out to one side. At that, invisible guns on the lifter sent a salvo arcing over the *Falcon's* hull and Han realized why the creature had veered to one side. Energy danced harmlessly over the starship's defensive shielding while Chewbacca let loose an answering shot that was itself confounded by the cargo lifter's energy deflectors.

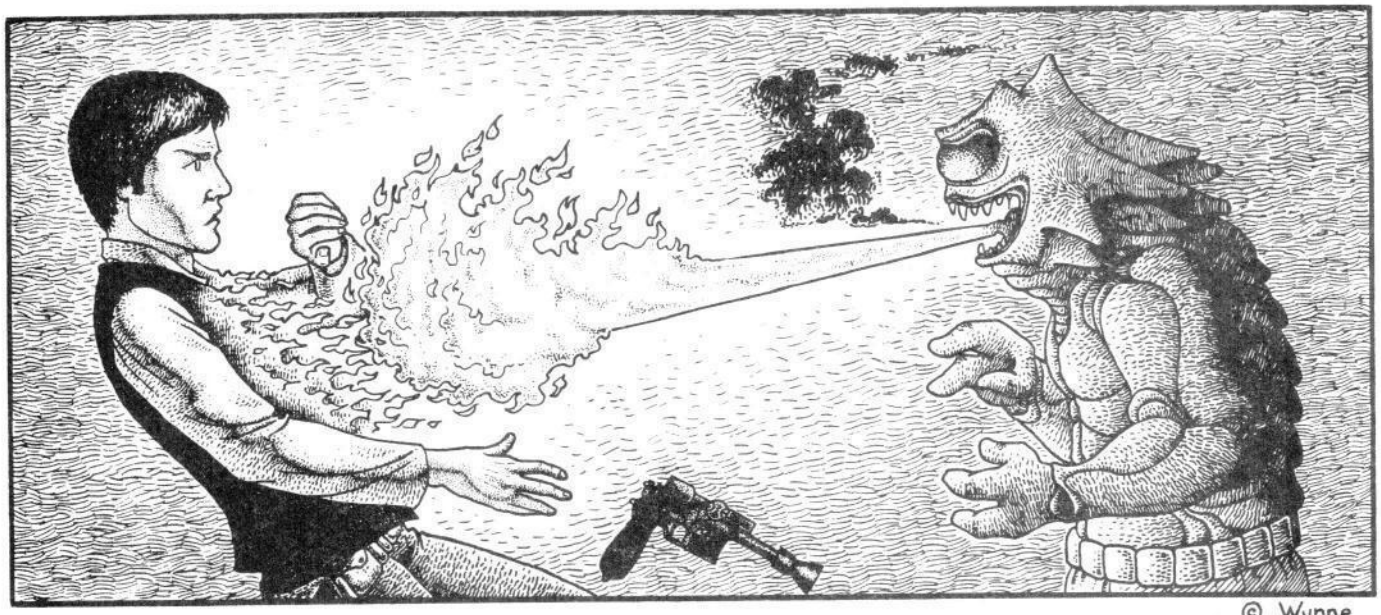
"Raxerian standoff," commented Han as he leveled his blaster at the alien, "except that I AM armed. Now talk fast."

"A mistake!" the alien croaked, moving closer to Han, "a miscue! Let's be reasonable, Solo, you still have the upper hand. All we want are the guns and you'll be paid as agreed."

"We're going to do this a little different now," Solo replied. Cupping the comlink again, he said, "Give us some light, Chewie." Immediately a spot flared to life above them, displacing the dark with a cone of brilliance which illuminated the two speakers.

Solo saw at once why the alien might have opted for darkness -- he was ugly. He shielded his single multi-faceted eye with a clawlike hand. *"Sheeinalglxachoo pitrogleetic!"* he garbled, his vocoder failing to find a sufficiently horrific equivalent Standard malediction. "It is light you want, yes?" and from his

grinning jaws came a belch of black smoke followed swiftly by a searing stream of flame that lashed out at Solo's chest and face, sending him backwards into the dark, the blaster slipping from his grip as he went down on the long grass.



Chewie couldn't see the action, but he heard the *whomp!* of flame and Solo's yelp of pain through the open comlink. Howling in fury, he rushed from the cockpit, shot the hatch and tore down the ramp. Ducking he cut under the mandible, heading for the cone of light.

The alien heard him coming and drew himself up for another burst, just as Chewie caught his furred toe aganst Han's shoulder, staggered and went down on all fours. The flame rushed over his back and dissipated. At once the Wookiee was up on one knee hauling at the cocking lever of his bowcaster, stooping low over Han's body for a clear shot at the bizarre alien who was approached cautiously, black tendrils of smoke curling about his head.

"Hold it right there, dragon!" commanded a new voice. Solo, who was just sitting up and smelling the unpleasant of his own charred flesh , thought incredulously, *a woman?*

The alien jerked to a startled halt, looking around nervously, but the light effectively blinded him to anything outside its perimeter. "Who calls the Gorloo?"

He was turning toward his own ship now, obviously looking for reinforcements, when the female voice came out of the darkness once again. "Still as a statue, dragon, or you are carrion." Then in a low voice she said quickly, "Captain Solo, if you are able, please move behind me to the safety of the ship. First Mate Chewbacca, help me cover our retreat."

Too astonished to ask questions, Han scrabbled around on the ground for his blaster then moved swiftly to the ramp, clenching his teeth against the pain. He staggered slightly, pushed himself up and inside, turning to watch the wary retreat. Chewbacca backed in, took a quick look at his partner and bared his fangs in a grin, then their rescuer emerged from the dark ramp into the low lit corridor. She hit the shot-locking switch and turned to face them.

Solo nearly forgot his pain. She was a stunning young woman, a finely chiselled beauty of the classic mode. Her brown hair was twisted into plaits and fastened in coils around her head. Pale, with dark assessing eyes, she was dressed in a functional, if somewhat picaresque, outfit of leather jerkin, shorts, and high boots. At her right hip was a tie down holster, empty, as the Rushak power pistol was still in her hand; and, Solo noted, it was covering them now. The woman jerked her head in the direction of the cockpit. "We lift off at once, Captain." Han started to protest but she shook her head. "You and your First Mate get us off planet where that surface hop cargo lift can't follow us and we'll talk then." Han saw some sense in that. "And I'll attend to your injuries."

"Just who are you?" Han asked, sliding gingerly into the pilot's seat.

"Fly, Captain."

"I'm flying, OK?"

The flame-throwing alien had apparently made it back to his ship, for the *Falcon* was obliged to lift off amid a dazzling hail of laser fire.

When they were safely launched into the star-dark outside Krinto's atmosphere, Solo turned around and confronted the woman again. "All right, lady, now who the hell are you, and what's going on?" It didn't come out as forcefully as he wished, however -- more like a gasp, as the full measure of the burning punishment he had taken nearly overwhelmed him. Chewie reached out an arm and supported his friend.

The woman was impassive, the barrel of her power pistol never wavering from a point midway between the two pilots, but she did smile slightly as she replied, "Captain Solo, I'm hijacking you."

* * * * * *

The spray was cool, anesthetizing. The woman gently peeled back the fragments of Han's shirt while Chewbacca stood watchfully to one side. Her power pistol was holstered, the bowcaster uncocked, and Han was in no mood to offer hostilities. They'd called a truce when she'd requested it; their consignment was still intact and the only violence done them so far was through the treachery of the contact man.

Han sighed as the raw burning pain gave way to cold oblivion. He moved his shoulders and she drew off his vest, then the rest of his shirt. When the spray had taken the edge off, the woman began to apply a healing salve to the angry-looking burned area covering Solo's chest and throat. Her hands were long with strong capable fingers and she seemed to take a certain pleasure in ministering to the afflicted.

"Shall we talk now, Captain?" she asked, gently massaging his pectorals. He thought just how pleasant this might be if, first he weren't so badly burned, and second, if he weren't numbed into nothingness by the spray.

"By all means." He looked at her directly, and she didn't evade his eyes.

"To begin with, then, my name is Rian Terrelian. I am from Yaniwess." Han's eyebrows went up at that, and Chewie muttered a low interrogative. "I was dispatched to Krinto to divert you and your cargo to Yaniwess. So far I have been successful." She let her fingers trail down Solo's arms and finally let her hands rest on his knees.

"All right, the obvious question is, who sent you?"

Again Rian smiled faintly. "I was instructed to ask you what you'd think were I to say 'Dead Drop'."

Now it was Han's turn. His mouth quirked at one corner, recalling that awesome canyon-obstacle which had almost ended his career for good during a wide-open roto-cross on a planet called Ganna II. "I would think," he replied, "of one over-the-hill dustbuster who stole my girl then saved my life so I couldn't kick about it."

Rian seemed startled out of her equitable poise. "The Lady Trella .... ?"

Han thought about the tall redhead with the boundless enthusiasms and appetites and decided that her appelation was surely titular. He'd never known Trella to behave anything remotely resembling a lady. "Trella, that's the one. So what do En Morgon Ben and his lovely Lady want with me?"

"Oh, it is no longer En Morgon. But it will soon be King!" she said staunchly. "The Prince instructed me to tell you that the future of Yaniwess is at stake."

"What's that to me?" Han responded.

"Prince Ben said you would say that. In fact, he said that the future of Yaniwess would be bantha droppings to you."

"Ah, the Prince wasn't far wrong."

"He also said to tell you that there are vast sums of money from the Trans-Empire Corporation and from the planetary treasury to be had. Also, of course, he'd pay you and your partner premium for your consignment of arms -- double whatever that dragon was offering. So, shall we do business, Captain Solo, or shall we shoot it out in customary style?"

Solo leaned back and directed an inquiring glance at Chewbacca. The Wookiee shrugged and mouthed a conditional affirmative, tossing the ball back. He turned to Rian with what he hoped was a pleasant expression -- the pain in his chest was returning and a grimace was imminent. "I've never been to Yaniwess," he said. "It'll be a pleasure."

* * * * * *

If a man had to make his home on a planet, thought Han, Yaniwess would be a good choice. Coming in from the night side, he raced the dawn line over high mountain ranges separated by wide lakes of sparkling blue. About the lakes stretched firtile valleys slooing up to thickly forested hills. The landscape was laced with delicate traceries of silver -- tributary streams feeding the lakes.

"My homeworld is a beautiful thing, Captain Solo," Rian said softly from the navigator's station behind him. "I'd never seen it like this before. The drone which took me to Krinto took off at night. What does your homeworld look like?"

"Not like this,"Han replied. He was wearing a shirt Rian had fashioned out of free fall netting. The burns were healing but still sensitive. As they flew at Rian's direction, they could see to the north a smoky pall indication substantial industrialization.

Chewie commented with a gutteral phrase and a wave of his giant paw, and Rian answered, "Yes, the capitol city, Adrick-Er of the Greater Provinces, now defiled by the usurper." She said it calmly but with an intensity which gave Solo occasion to raise his eyes skyward and shake his head at the amount of energy men could expend on causes. That was what spending life on the ground does for you, he thought -- it made you a sucker for territorial disputes and all manner of nationalistic folly. The only home Solo had was his ship, and he liked it that way.

Rian indicated a more southerly course now, away from the low-lying industrial area surrounding Adrick-Er and deeper into the mountainous country.

"How much farther? We should have been picked up by patrol ships by now." Han was keeping a wary eye on the long ranger sensors, assuring himself that sooner or later things would get tricky, but the woman replied, "Yaniwess is still on open status. We would only be question were we to attempt to land in the north. Don't be concerned. There!" She pointed right where an escarpment loomed.

Perhaps three hundred feet vertically, it resembled a cut-away cylinder of gray stone. Within the semicircle of its base green hills piled, and atop the highest hill Han could see a sprawling bastion of stone. "There is Sentinel South. Prince Ben is there."

"Then maybe I'll get some answers," Solo said, half to himself. Rian had been closemouthed about just what was happening on Yaniwess, and he was beginning to succumb to the peevishness he was liable to when people, or situations, contrived to deprive him of information.

Han brought the *Falcon* to hover above the topmost battlements of Sentinel South. "You may land in the courtyard, Captain. Your ship will be safer inside our walls.

It occured to him that the cool, competant hijacker with the sensational legs might be any number of things, not the least of which was a liar, but he quieted his misgivings and, having nowhere else to go for the moment, made an expert setdown in the wide courtyard behind the massive walls.

They were met at the foor of the boarding ramp by a young man in a uniform every bit as rakish as Rian's was fanciful. The badge emblazoned on his bright blue surcoat was a triskelion affair involving eagles enclosing a five-point starburst. He smiled affably at the two spacers as they descended onto the sunwashed stone paved landing area, but appeared to save his most enthusiastic greeting for Rian Terrelian. "Commander, welcome home, and congratulations on a successful mission." He beamed and offered her a hand, though Rian was quick capable of negotiating the ramp unassisted. "Are these our guests then, Commander?"

Indicating the pilot, she replied, "Captain Han Solo. The Wookiee is called Chewbacca and is First Mate of this ship. Gentlemen, Randi Adrick, nephew to Prince Ben."

There was an exchange of greetings while Solo wondered briefly what sort of relationship existed between Ben and the son of his younger brother who, according to the Prince, had an alarming way of running through the planetary treasury. But the young man, extravagantly blonde with shoulder-length hair and merry eyes, seemed full of genuine good spirits and courtly manners. *Dashing,* Solo thought -- *the boy's got style.*

"Randi, see to unloading the weaponry, top speed ... "

Solo interrupted her with, "Hey, hold it! What's the rush? I usually like to see the color of the cash before I dump my cargo."

"Captain, you are a difficult man to deal with." Rian seemed impervious to anger and merely eyed him calmly.

Solo took her sally as a compliment. "When I get jerked around, yeah, you bet I am. I want to see Ben and get a few straight answers."

"I was on the point of taking you to the Prince. Haste is essential." She sighed. "Will you not hold your skepticism in abeyance from here to the reception room? I apologize for not being at liberty to tell you all you might wish to know."

At least, Han thought, she recognized his annoyance at having to act half blind, and it mollified him somewhat. He frowned at the ship. "OK, go to it. But Chewie will stick around and keep an eye on things." He tipped the Wookiee a familiar look. "I'll be back as soon as I've had an audience with our royal host."

Leaving Randi to supervise the offloading, the commander lead Han into the castle proper, an imposing pile of shaped stone with massive beamed ceiling and an airy echo. People moved about, intent on errands of their own, scarcely noticing the two as they strode purposefully through the corridors.

Even in his free-fall shirt, Han decided, he wasn't dressed any more eccentrically than some of Sentinel South's inhabitants. Armed to a man, and woman, they sported leather fashions and bright silks. Boots

ranged from ankle-toppers with belled jesses to the thigh-high numbers with yards of thong lacing. Solo wondered if Trella had anything to do with Yaniwess' *haute coture*.

"Nice place you've got here," he ventured.

Not breaking her brisk stride, Rian regarded him sideway with her inscrutable glance. "We took Sentinel South with 348 lives." Han missed a beat. *Lives? What is Ben Adrick up to?* It wasn't long before he had his answer.

At the head of a short flight of stone steps, a uniformed guard ushered them into the reception room. Behind a polished plank table which ran nearly the width of the chamber stood the brawny tavern brawler, wily roto-crosser, jaunty man-of-all-action who would be King of Yaniwess, Ben Adrick. There was perhaps more silver in his shaggy dark hair, and the dramatic handlebar moustaches were lengthier than Solo recalled, but the flashing grin was as wide and friendly as ever.

"Han! Damn! She said she'd bring you, but I only half believed it!" He held out a hand.

Solo stepped forward, clasped it firmly. "Ben."

"Well, gods' grins, man, you look ... burned!"

"Uh... the original consignee of the gun shipment had a trick or two up his sleeve. How did you know where to look me up? Krinto's a pretty out-of-the-way place."

Ben shrugged. "I have a few off-planet information sources. I got word of a shipment of armament -- things we could use -- and your name was mentioned. Nothing mysterious. Your contact tried to fry you?"

"It was the Gorloo, as we guess, Sire. Captain Solo was taken off guard."

From a corner of the room behind Ben they heard an amused voice remark, "That would have been something to see!"

Han grinned. "Trella, is that you?"

"Bet your asteroids, Solo," said the would-be queen of Yaniwess, rising and coming to stand beside her husband. She was gowned toe to throat in a lavish iridescent aquamarine shift and Solo bet privately that she still looked like a Danis showgirl underneath it.

"Royalty agrees with you, gorgeous," Han decided.

Rian looked slightly scandalized at the casual repartee, and he found that in some way that pleased him.

Trella did look sensational. She also looked contented and happy and no older than the last time Han had seen her disappearing on Adrick's arm through a docking bay doorway. Yet there were recently etched frown lines between her liquid green eyes which made him more curious than ever as to what kind of a mess he'd landed himself and Chewie in.

But she was smiling gaily for all her worry. "Han, it's good to see you again. Where's Chewie?"

"Chewie's with the *Falcon*. I told him I'd be back."

"Rian," Ben signalled, and the commander nodded brusquely, turned on her heel and hurried out of the room to fetch the Wookiee; relieved, Han thought to be free of the strange web of familiarity connecting her liege, his lady and an enigmatic outworlder.

The moment they were alone Han exploded. "Adrick, what the hell is going on here? You send some hotshot female to hijack me, bring me out to East Crapcake Nowhere, and stand there grinning like a ... " He looked Ben up and down briefly, noticing the triskelion badge on his laced tunic, " ... like an overaged Honor Scout!"

Ben continued to smile. "Go ahead, Han, blow it off. You'll feel better."

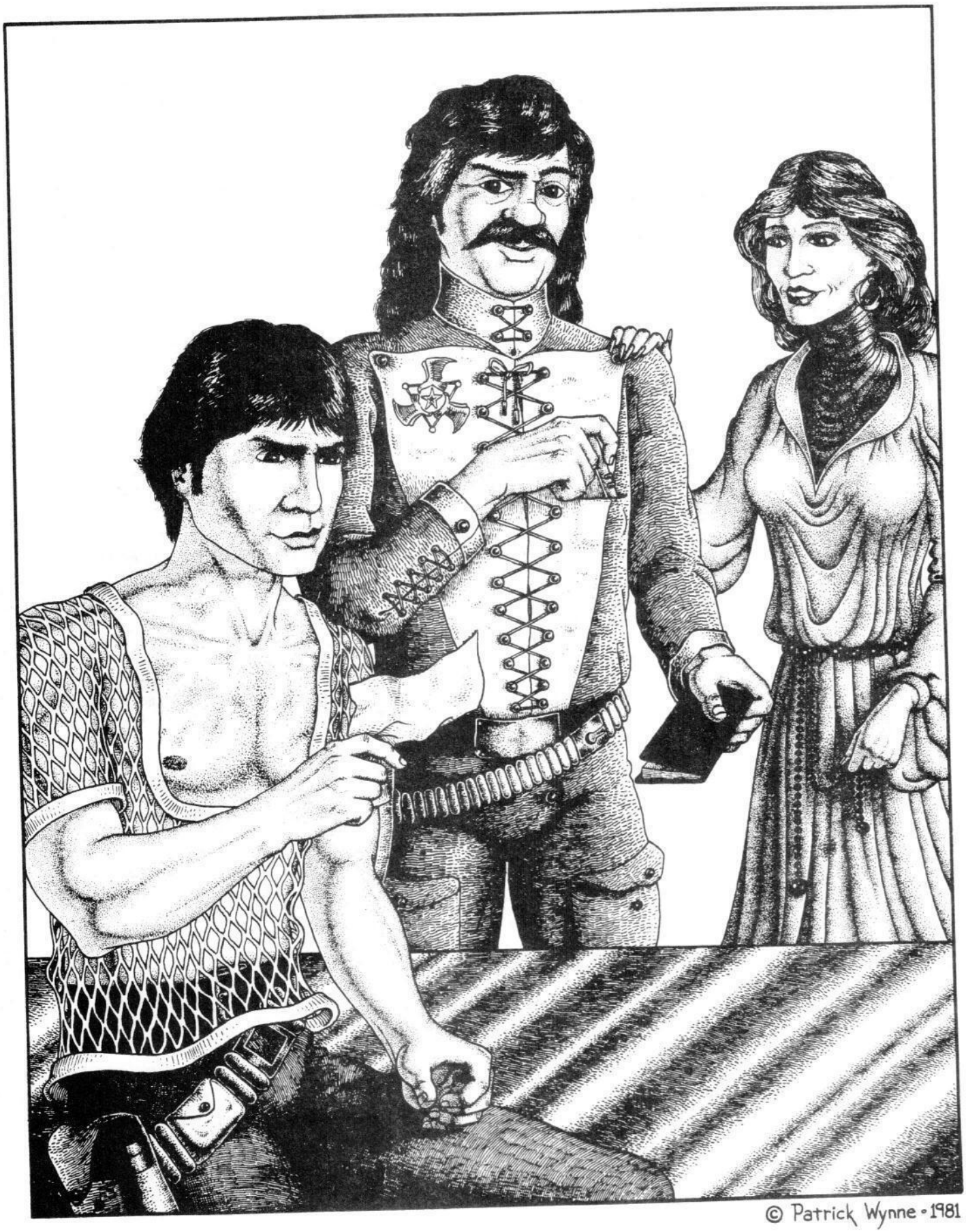
"I don't give a damn about feeling better! I want to know what's going on!" He planted his knuckles on his hips, radiating stubbornness.

"Sweet and simple, then, Han? I'm overthrowing the government and I need your shipful of guns."

Solo's eyes narrowed. "I came all the way from Krinto for a bad joke?"

"No, I'm serious. Sit, I'll fill you in. I'll also pay you by the way. Here." Ben dipped into a thigh pocket and came up with a credit book. He scrawled across one sheet with a light stylus and handed it to the pilot, who scrutinized it carefully.

"This is a TREC voucher."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"Good as gomelinite from the Tion to the Arc."

"I know, I know," Han said, hitching around to half-sit on the table and look intently at the the slip made out in his favor for several times the amount Rian had suggested. "Where'd you get it?"

"Han, have you ever heard the story about the good little prince and the wicked stepmother? My father did one very stupid thing before he died. He remarried. She had inherited a director's chair on the Trans Empire Corporation from her first husband and she traded it to my father for royal status. I think he must have gone a little soft," Ben gestured toward his temple, "at the end. Anyway, when Trella and I got here a couple years ago, he was dead, and Madam M"Zeel was back in possession of her board chair AND the reins of the planetary government. She's a lousy administrator, besides being paranoid, greedy, and mean as a dinko."

"She's also built like a suborbital barge," added Trella,

"A thoroughly charming lady, I'm sure." Han agreed.

"The people were on the verge of open revolution -- Rian, whom you've met, was the rebel leader, by the way," Ben continued. "M'Zeel wanted me to join forces with her. I'm an Adrick, the eldest son -- our planet is very long on tradition -- and I had the people with me, but, hell ... " He spread his hands in the elaborate shrug Solo remembered.

Trella continued, "She settled for Ben's kid brother, Bar, a real pleek -- excuse me, darling, but you know he is -- brought it a lot of TREC muscle to consolidate her position and declared us renegades. It was shoot and run for a while there." She grinned at the Prince. "But now we've ... "

The rest of her disclosure was halted by a whoop of sirens. Han slid off the table blurring his gun into action and looking for targets.

"It's the old Royal Air Force, my friend, coming to pay a visit, and I don't think your blaster is quite up the the task," Ben yelled over the noise.

As he holstered his gun, Solo's smile was sardonic. "They're going to cook you, you know," he said. He gazed up at the dim vaulting far above his head, visualizing the blue sky beyond full of hostile aircraft circling busily while they dropped fusion bombs down that cylindrical well of rock right onto Sentinel South.

"Han, give us a break. The whole top of the escarpment's thick with gun implacements, and in the courtyard right now sits a very lethal quad mount cannon."

"You knew they were coming!"

"Shewd guess."

Solo wasn't sure whether Adrick was referring to his own powers of precognition or Han's estimation of his cunning, but he glared. "If anything happens to my ship..."

"Put Chewie in the *Falcon* and tell him to shoot straight up. Her sheilds sould stop anything they've got. Come on! We've got to MOVE!" Ben gave Trella a gentle shove in the direction of the rear door, then vaulted the table. He slapped Han between the shoulder blades. "Hey, junior, I like your shirt."

Without quite knowing why, Han found himself running alongside the older man, the familiar adrenalin rush of combat intensifying his senses and charging him with something almost like pleasure. "Your set up here, Ben --it just might work. It reminds me of the corrie-nest traps on Voola."

"They say the women of Voola are winged."

They were both looking straight ahead, clattering down the stone corridor and Han was obliged to raise his voice over the siren's undulations. "They are! Feathers!"

"Feathers?"

"Feathers. Down."

"I'll be damned."

Rounding the corner they ran into Chewbacca, Rian, and Randi. The Wookiee put out a huge forearm and brought Solo up short. "Chewie, double quick back to the *Falcon* and layer sheilds topside max. I want you in the top gun and very sharp." The Wookiee grinned a look of fanged enthusiasm, nodded once and was gone the way he'd come.

Meanwhile, Randi had appraised Adrick of the situation. "They're coming in at 0 niner 7, northeast," he said quickly, "a dozen we count. They can't evade our sensors so we have some lead time. Han," he faced the pilot directly, "will you man an escarpment gun?"

"What am I supposed to say? Your wish is my command?" He looked away disgustedly and laughed. "For old times sake. This one time. Once. Then I'm gone. Agreed?"

"A deal." Ben turned to Randi. "Son, is your old man in this little escapade?"

"Uncle, I sincerely hope not. He's not much of a pilot."

"Good, man an escarpment gun. Rian, take Han up to the South face. Randi'n I'll bracket them on the north. We'll pick up intermediates on the way. Go!" He whirled and pounded off down an intersecting corridor, the stalwart youth at his heels.

"This way, Captain," said Commander Terellian. He followed her in the opposite direction through a ray sheilded station and into a bounce tube cut, apparently into the rock escarpment itself, a vast flume, that in moments popped them into the sunshine and breathtaking vistas a hundred meters above the sprawling mass of Sentinel South.

The sky was clear, the prospect seemingly limitless. Han supposed they would be able to see them before they heard them. "What are we up against here? What are they sending?"

"I'll know as soon as you, Captain. Meanwhile, we'd best get to our guns. Will you take the Howler?" She gestured to a tidy, business-like single bore cannon fuse bolted to a formex slab near the dizzying edge of the escarpment, and moved quickly to the right to place herself behind the sights of a twin bore projectile gun. Someone ahd scrawled the ledgend 'M'Zeel's Bane' on its magazine. Behind them a grove of dak trees, thick trunked and massive, provided a cover of sorts.

Howler, thought Han. Borodine RT120 phaser cannon nicknamed the Howler. He'd fired one before. Sliding into the gunner's seat he fitted his feet into the radial response slips and pressed one after the other. The gun emplacement swung right and left, while the hand grips unlocked giving him full control of the main bore.

A high-pitched hum reached their ears. Han swivled the cannon to track the squadron of small air to air ships that suddenly shot over the escarpment's edge. They were slant-wing fighters of a type Han had never seen before, though he was willing to give them the benefit of a doubt, and ready to accord them negative respect.

Like silver arrowheads they zipped into the sky above the gunners, aligning themselves into an X formation. Han opened fire. The Howler lived up to its name, blasting a pulsing phase beam at the nearest slant-wing. The ship shot fifty meters into the air, spinning end over. Solo crowed delightedly. It seemed almost too easy.

Over the noise of the weaponry he heard Rian shouting, "You just hit its sheilding! It'll flip and come right back at you! They're only vulnerable when they vector!"

"What?"

"When they vector! Head on, lateral, vertical! Place your shots!"

Right, boss, Han thought, scowling. He took his flush of anger out on the slant-wings, throwing a trigger-lock barrage that, more through luck than skill, caught a vulnerable area and blew one sleek ship out of the sky. He turned towards Rian with a superior smirk, only to be met with her look of cold contempt. Solo went back to his gun, wondering how Chewie was doing.

The Wookiee was enjoying himself. Flat on his back in the *Falcon's* top turret he fired the big cannon straight up, whuffing with surprise as he watched the ship he'd sighted get tossed high, only to realign itself and swoop down again into the fray, dropping one of its load bombs to explode harmlessly against the *Falcon's* deflectors.

He tried once more and again the slant-wing bounced up, circled and dove. Something about this series of manuvers amused the Wookiee. He chuckled -- his staccato growl sounding like a recalcitrant roto-drive -- and opened his guns all the way up, quartering the sky above Sentinel South, where upon the entire squadron of slant-wings began to leap and spin on the top of his laser updraft. He roared with mirth. It reminded him of toasting pop nuts.

On the escarpment the gunners were startled to see the dazzling impromptu acrobatics. Han laughed with appreciation for Chewie's outrageous game and kept directing a constant stream of blue energy at the hapless fighters.

One by one, however, they managed to vector free of the *Falcon's* fusilade and sail out to regroup. As they did so, Rian scored a hit and her slant-wing went into a spinning dive.

Giving the *Falcon's* field of fire a wide berth, the remaining ships directed their attention to the gun emplacements, and the gunners, north face, south and in between, had their hands full. Now, however, the fighters were forced to come in head on firing, providing unshielded nose targets.

Han circled rapidly, zeroing in on one after another of the small fighters, trying to pinpoint his phaser beams with painstaking accuracy. All around him energy slashed and sizzled.

Further north along the escarpment's curve, a gun emplacement exploded. Simultaneously, Ben found his target and another slant-wing angled off trailing flames. Odds were about even.

Han had noticed one pilot with a predictable pattern to his attack runs. Leading him slightly, anticipating with super sensative intuition, Han fired just as the fighter swung 90 degrees and opened up on him. Phase beams went up the slant-wing's forward intake and she exploded with a gratifying thunder and flash.

Behind him a central gunner took out another fighter, her pilot catapulting free and drifting down behind the trees, dangling from the lines of his jettison chute. With that score, the squadron leader appeared to decide that his losses were better cut, and the remaining fighters veered off northward.

Only one hung back for a parting shot. Aimed at Han, who fired back and missed, the projectile sliced a nearby dak tree, cleaving the vast girth so that one half crashed backwards into the thicket and the other careened toward the escarpment edge, its ponderous weight slamming into Han's cannon barrel. The impetus was so great that the entire emplacement was ripped from its foundations.

As he was thrown clear, Han experienced a moment of awe, seeing the fuse-bolts pulling clear of the cracking formex. Then he was rolling, flailing, grasping frantically for purchase and, horribly, sliding over the edge of the escarpment.

With desperate strength his fingers clung to the rock, toes scrabbling for support and finding none. Any second now, he knew, his muscles would fail him. Gravel slides peppered his face. Between the soles of his boots and the topmost battlements of Sentinel South there was nothing, absolutely nothing, but 100 meters of empty air.

Then he heard Rian's voice. "Captain! Hold on a moment longer. I can get you. Hold on!" He wanted to tell her no, his weight would pull them both over, but found he couldn't speak. He looked up. Rian was leaning dangerously far out, her hand reaching down to fasten firmly on his right wrist.

"No," he managed. "We'll both go."

"Nonsense." She had a grip on him and was letting down a line with the other hand. "Take this. Wrap it tightly about your left hand. You'll have to trust yourself to my strength while you do so." More gravel pelted him. Breathing was becoming enormously difficult.

He closed his eyes and hung on in a wrist lock grip to Rain's left arm, whipping the slender line several times around his left wrist and hand. "We'll never make it," he gasped.

"Captain Solo, there are three husky young gunners holding me by the legs. We'll make it!"

"Well, pull, damn it!"

"Pulling."

Inch by inch they hauled Solo up and over the edge, the stone surface doing agonizing things to his half-healed burns. But eventually he felt the ground under him again. Rolling onto his back, he gazed greatfully at the clear sky, cathing his breath. Rian knelt beside him with a concerned look. Solo wondered how she did it -- hardly a hair was out of place.

"It's a good thing those fighters beat it when they did," he said finally.

"Oh?"

"Yeah. My gun's busted."

* * * * * *

Revolutionaries, Han decided, were an odd lot. They were treating him as though he had thrown himself off the cliff in some grand gesture of defiance instead of being knocked ass over afterburners by a falling tree. In short, they were treating him like a hero, and although they were making far too much fuss, he had to admit it was pleasant.

Skillfully tended by Sentinel South's medical team, bathed, refreshed, and pampered, wearing some of Ben's own silks, he lounged on an enormous contour form chair in one of the recreation areas in the royal apartments Around him were a clutch of outlaw demi-nobles, a favored few rank and file rebels and several frankly admiring women. Rian was not among them, having begged off to attend to some personal matcers.

Chewie stretched out nearby enjoying prodigious quantities of a local potable and the awed attention of a group of younger Yaniwess aristocracy who hung on his every growl. He was recounting the engagement with the slant-wings, complete with vigorous gestures, and was nearly overcome again with the humor of the situation.

"...and," Ben was saying as Han helped himself to a handful of salted flix and washed it down with T'iil T'iil, "she's fortified the palace in Adrick-Er. We'll have a fight on our hands, but with the weapons you've provided I think we have a good chance."

"All the luck. Tell me about the TREC Board chair."

"Oh, glad you asked. That's a real killer. The chair is invested in the name of 'The Planetary Ruler of Yaniwess' who. of course, is me -- if I can bump M'Zeel. An awesome thought, that."

"You're really serious, aren't you?"

Ben hesitated a moment before answering. "Yeah, Han, I guess I am. When I got back here and saw what was happening...I found out that I cared. This is my home." Han looked away. "Besides, M'Zeel sold all our heads, mine, Trella's, the kid's..."

"Kids?"

"Sure!" Ben grinned widely. Randi, fetch Young Ben and Twink." The blonde rebel sketched a jaunty salute and left the group around Chewbacca.

Trella appeared at Han's elbow. "For the hero," she said with a droll expression. "Yaniwess' own brandy, and I laced it with mancet. You Corellians all love mancet, don't you? They say you're weaned on it."

"This Corellian does. What is it, Trell? Are the kids that bad?"

"Drink! Drink!" she alughed as Han sipped the liquid, its customary amber color shaded to red by the addition of the euphoric.

A few moments later, in his very best mancet-mood, Han was introduced to Ben and Trella's children. A pair of four year old twins, they stood on either side of Randi, holding his hands.

Han, who had about as much use for children as he did for a second navel, regarded them with benign good grace. They stared back, red-headed poppets with Ben's dark eyes. At last the girl, the one her father had called Twink, spoke up.

"Cap'n Slow, are you a fox? My mummy says you're a real ... "

Over Ben's laughter they heard Trella saying seriously, "Yes, dear. Captain Solo is quite a fox."

Han grinned at the little girl, having no idea what to say. She continued to observe him solemnly, not interested in the adult mirth she had occasioned. Then she asked, "Mummy, can I have a fox?"

When the burst of hilarity had subsided, Ben intoned formally, "Captain, allow me to present the En Morgon of Yaniwess, Young Ben Adrick, and his sister, the Princess Hana."

Solo's gaze slide suspiciously to the parents. "Tell me you didn't."

"Oh, on the contrary," said Trella, "it was Ben's idea. He figured we owed you a lot."

Solo shook his head in wonderment. Getting involved with an amiable roto-crosser years ago and parsecs away had set off a significant explosion of events, and he was fairly sure he hand't heard the last of the repercussions.

* * * * * *

Early the next morning, to a terrified nursemaid, fell the unenviable task of informing Ben and Trella that their children had been kidnapped.

Han was in a sunlit dream where a girl ran singing on the sand. She turned, her golden hair streaming in the sea breeze, beckoning to him and he recognized her. *Han*, she called, smiling. *Han* ...

"Han! Wake up! Wake, up, Han!" Ben's hand shook his shoulder roughly. Wake up, man!"

"Ben ... what?"

"It's M'Zeel. She's got the children."

Sleep rushed away from him like a ship at light speed. He sat up, throwing off the covers, aware of Ben's suppressed fear and the angush threatening to overwhelm him in the trembling of his hand. He dressed quickly, in grim silence, not venturing any guesses until he knew more, and unwilling to offer comfort where there might be no hope at all.

In a moment they were at the door of the nursery, a fanciful, whimsical place full of color, made grotesque by the horrible fact that the children were gone; and by the sound of a woman weeping.

"Trell ... " Han had never seen, never imagined, that Trella could cry.

She turned at his voice, distraught, her tear-streaked face twisted into lines of pain. "Oh, Ben, they're gone." She threw herself into her husband's arms, burying her face against his shoulder, sobbing.

Han stepped past them into the room, feeling the weight, the sense of dread. Suddenly it was all so serious. The valiant plans, the high adventure -- it was nothing in the face of reality. He looked around along the lines of the ceiling, checked out the walls. "How?"

Ben spoke past Trella. "We guess they were taken out of the upper windows onto the roof."

"Where's Randi?" Solo asked it casually, but Ben took his meaning at once.

"No, not Randi."

"Sire," Rian Terellian pushed through the gathering of retainers, "Madame," and she nodded to Trella. "I hold myself responsible. The guards were lax following victory ... "

Ben cut her off with a gesture. "Recriminations are pointless. All I want to hear now are some good ideas on how we get them back,"

"But, Ben, who ... ?" Trella's voice rose with stunned incomprehension.

"People will do many things for money." Rian was looking at Han.

"What's that supposed to mean? Whose idea was it to come to Yaniwess, anyway? Where were you all night? Shining your shorts?"

"The Wookiee -- where is he?"

Solo was angry now. "Sleeping off a whopper, which you would have known if you'd stuck around with the rest of us."

"Rian." It was Trella again. Softly, but with great authority, she said to the commander, "These two are blameless, whatever has happened. Quiet your suspicions.:

"It is my job to be suspicious, Madame," Rian reminded her, eyeing Solo darkly. He returned to his scrutiny of the room.

"What does your ransom note say?"

"No ransom. It just said that by the time we read it, the children will be in M'Zeel's custody. The price for their freedom is me. She offers to exchange them for me."

"Will you do it?"

"It's the one thing I can't do, Han. I know M'Zeel. If she gets her hands on me, all three of us are dead. No. Their lives depend on me staying clear of her. As long as I'm free, she'll let them live -- as bait."

"Let me see the note."

Ben at once handed over the single sheet. Han was still surveying the upper windows and muttering "...something, something..." He glanced at the paper, back to the window again, then finished the brief note. "That's it," he said quietly, "look. It's written with a pilot's push feed pen. The air raid yesterday..." They were watching him, puzzled. "You don't see, do you? Remember the one pilot who jettisoned? The whole pack took off like spooked plains grazers as soon as he was out. It was just a diversion. Didn't anyone pick him up?" The silence said it all. "There's your kidnapper, Ben. A jet-harness jump from the escarpment to the roof, in that window, and a jump out. They probably had a rendezvous all arranged. So," he turned a slight smile on Rian, "you can relax, Commander, and start thinking of ways to get them out of Adrick-Er."

"Han's right," Ben said at last. "I can't do it. Randi would be willing, but he'd be recognized at once."

Ben looked tired, afraid, and, suddenly, old. Trella was leaning against the doorway arch, hands pressed to her face.

Han thought, *If you put your foot in it you'll be sorry. You won't respect yourself in the morning. Hell, you probably won't even be around in the morning to kick yourself which is what you ought to be doing right now. If you keep your mouth shut, you won't say it. Say it now before you change your mind.* He concentrated very hard on a little boy who had Ben's eyes and a small red-head who wanted a fox... "Let me give it a try."

* * * * * *

The vegitation in those latitudes of Yaniwess' western hemisphere was undergoing a seasonal color change. Brilliant swathes of crimson and shimmering gold covered the hillsides, and in the meadows on either side of the riding track grew low shrubs of a rich brown dotted with bright orange berries.

Mounted on a pair of tall, elegant riding animals, Solo and Rian made their way north through the gentle hill country outside Adrick-Er. The lifter had dropped them and their mounts a dozen kilometers out and had returned to Sentinel south to report that the two riders were safely on their way.

They were dressed in traveling clothes suitable for the landed gentry -- belted tunics, leather pants and boots, and long flowing cloaks, fastened at the shoulder with detailed clasps.

The sun was warm, the sky fair, their pace was leisurely, and though their mission was a desperate one full of dangers, both the ones they anticipated and the unexpected pitfalls which surely lay ahead, Solo set his mind to enjoying the ride as much as possible.

"So you were the rebel leader before Ben came back," he said conversationally.

Rian regarded him briefly. She no longer seemed to suspect him of complicity in the kidnapping, yet her manner was as cooly formal as ever. "That's right. My family has been loyal to the crown for generations. But when the old King died and that monstrous M'Zeel usurped the power with Bar Adrick as figurehead...my father declared our allegiance at an end. For that Bar Adrick killed him."

There was a bitterness in her voice that surprised Solo with the pain it appeared to camoflage. Trella's tears, and now heartbreak from this icy commander. He remained silent.

In a moment she continued. "There is a blood feud between our houses now," as if this should convey something significant to him.

He answered, "Seems like this whole planet is one big blood feud."

"Randi and I were betrothed."

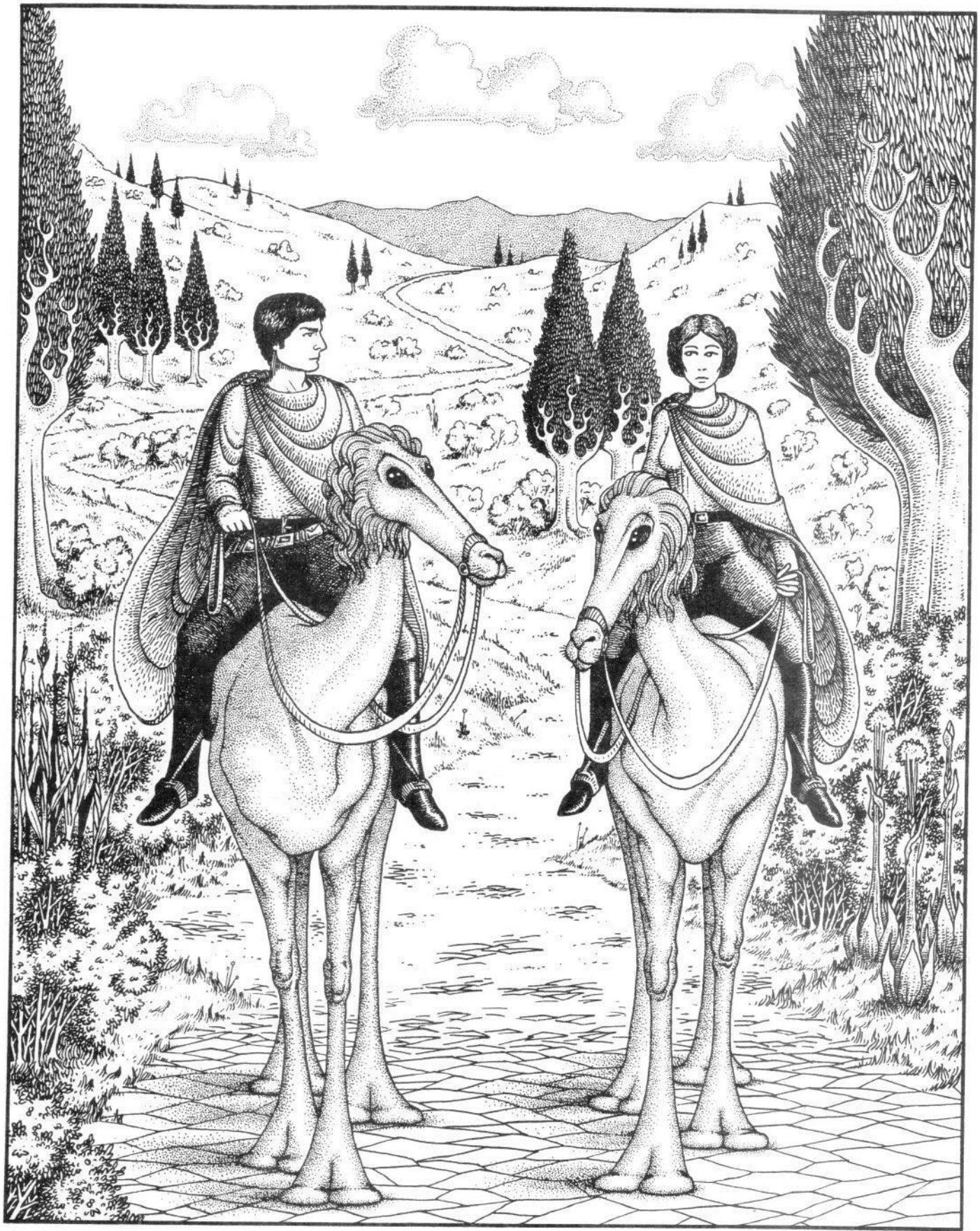
"Oh..."

"Am I cold, Captain Solo? Have I no emotions?" Her eyes were very bright. She turned her face away. "I have given my heart to the rebellion now. Our code is a life for a life and the house of Bar Adrick owes the house of Shas Terellian one life."

Solo considered the antiquated business of codes and feuds about as valid a guideline for running a life as the Corporate Sector Authority trade regulations were for running a profitable freight hauling operation, but her explaination made things easier to understand.

"O.K. Thanks for telling me. I might've made a play for you..." She whirled to face him, shocked, "and I don't think my ego could've stood the rejection," he finished. She stared a moment, then began to smile, as he'd intended. The tension ebbed away.

As they rode on through the morning they discussed possible plans of action and strategies. All that had been definately agreed upon before their departure from Sentinel South was that Ben, Chewie, and Randi in the *Falcon* would establish a round-the-clock watch from a vantage point near Adrick-Er. The rebel troops were to be marshalled, ready for a massive assault when and if Solo gave the signal. Having no way of knowing what Chance might toss in their path, he'd not elaborated on the signal--he'd simply told Ben to be on the look-out, and promised a diversion of some sort if at all possible. They discussed the tower-keep, Star Reach, where Rian



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was certain the children would be held, a bastion in the center of the palace complex.

"Won't you be recognized?" he asked.

"It's possible, of course, but we were out-country nobles, seldom at court."

"Have you always braided your hair like that?"

"Why yes."

"Let it down. It'll give you an edge."

Surprised at herself, she reached up to obey immeadiately, unfastening the long loops and combing them free with her fingers. Her hair was very long.

He surveyed her judiciously. "Now you don't look like old blood and thunder Commander Terellian at all."

And, when she smiled, he didn't.

* * * * * *

"First, we gotta get in."

Rian and Han stood together across a broad paved roadway from the maingate of the palace. Rising up from the imposing architectural monstrosity of the complex proper was Star Reach, a four-sided tower of stone that fell short by a hundred meters or so of being impressive. It was, however, sturdy looking and dishearteningly impenetrable. Upon its spacious flat roof, Solo could see half a dozen of what looked to be large baloons, sprouting like giant puffballs among the antenna of a weather station.

" Getting in, at least into the palace, won't be a problem. Today's a festival. Ritual hospitality is the order, and even M'Zeel can't disregard tradition for fear of alienating what followers she has -- I mean the Yaniwanes, not the TREC hirelings."

Han rested his palm on the butt of his blaster. As became a lady from the Provinces, Rian was unarmed.

"So we just walk in?"

"There will be security snoops and palace guards, but it is against the spirit of the festival to hinder anyone who wishes to enter. Even the poorest do this. It's the custom."

"Well, let's go slumming."

The joined a crowd outside the gate and presently found themselves inside an enourmous reception area. Its domed ceiling disappeared in the shadows. A few meters above their heads a mezzanine made a sweeping circle of the room. About them and above them milled a crowd of visitors.

Rian took Solo's hand and headed toward an archway leading further back into the palace when a man's voice from the mezzanine called out, "Terellian!" Rian looked up before Han could stop her. Bending low over the railing a man peered down shouting, "It is the daughter of Shas the Outlaw! Arrest her and the companion at once!"

"They popped us quick enough," Solo muttered, drawing his weapon.

"Quickly, this way," Rain urged, tugging him along toward a side door as several authority-types began to converge on them. No one had fired yet.

"That was a useless experience," said Solo. "Getting back in there a second time's gonna be like cracking Pluvo's safe!"

They ran down a corridor and back out into the sunshine, through a small gate, down an alley and, scrambled over a wall to drop onto a side street, the pursuit hot on their heels.

"What we need is some power under us," Han panted. They careened around another corner, cloaks billowing behind them, and suddenly Han saw a possible solution to their immediate problem. Leaning against a wall ahead of them was something with an engine and wheels.

He pulled Rian into a side street then into a recessed doorway, finger to lips. Scarcely daring to breathe, they froze until the noise of the guards pounded on past the mouth of the alley. Then, very quietly, they moved back out to the street and approached the vehicle. It was a roto-crosser.

"Can you operate this?"

"What would you think if I said 'Dead Drop'?"

"Of course, forgive me."

Han swung astride the saddle and kicked the bike to life. "Hop on and hang on," he said over his shoulder. The engine roared as Han cranked the hand grips and the bike shot away down the street toward the group of palace guards who had momentarily lost their quarry and were standing indecisively in the middle of the narrow way. Solo aimed straight for them and, at full torque, crashed into their midst, sending them scattering like domestic fowl. Then they opened fire.

Rian had the great good sense to plant her boots firmly on the pegs and wrap her arms tightly about his waist making herself as much as possible a part of his body and letting him handle the balance and finesse. In this manner they negotiated a series of tight back street turns and emerged onto a broad throughfare hoping to outdistance the pursuit.

The military hovervan which raced toward them in the opposite lane of traffic, skidding into a U-turn and lifting across the lane divider to fall in on their tail, cut that hope in half, but Han figured they still had a chance if the could get far enough ahead to make a detour, ditch the bike, and lie low for a while. They needed something to slow the van down.

He felt Rian loosen her grip and wriggle around behind him. "I know I shouldn't ask, Captain," she shouted as lase-fire streaked past them, "but can you do a front wheelie?"

"On a 2x2? Sure!" Han hollered back.

"Well, do one when I say... Now!"

Solo hit the torque-front with a touch of lift and the forward wheel raised off the pavement a few inches. Lateral stabilizers locked the bike into lift mode and Han twisted maximum power out of the hand grips. The bike raked forward momentarily, and as the rear wheel, along with the exhaust cylinder, lifted clear of the pavement, Rian took the opportunity to unclasp her cloak and drape it over the back of the bike where the powerful blast from the exhaust caught it, filled it out, and as she let go, blew it back against the windshield of the hovervan.

There was a flatulant sound of brakes frantically applied and a metallic scream as the van made sudden contact with the road surface.

Solo gunned the engine and the bike lept away from the discomfitted pursuer. But for all he pushed the rotocrosser, the van began to gain on them again.

He swung left, cutting across a busy traffic lane onto an intersecting boulevard. They were racing through a park area now, along wide curving avenues overhung with colorful trees.

Han felt Rian slide a hand nown his right hip and, tugging at the retaining strap of his holster, pull the big gun free. Taking a firm grasp on his gunbelt with her left hand, she leaned dangerously far back, swinging around to peg shots at the hovervan. The occupants ducked and the van swerved as she connected, but they kept coming.

Then it seemed as though someone aboard finally got tired of playing games. The van's roof vent slid back and a grenade launch platform whined up into position.

Rian saw the maneuver and yelled something to Solo who couldn't make out what she was saying, aware of the heavy artillery tactic only when an enormous chunk of road exploded in front of him. Fire flashed. Pieces of road surface whistled past them and a gaping hole appeared, smoke curling at its raw, jagged edges.

Solo threw the bike into a skid, slewing it around, fighting for control with his entire body. He felt the disorienting weight shift as Rian was thrown clear. He leaned into the steering bars to compensate. Scenery flashed past him at odd angles, but he thought he could still save it until, out of the corner of his eye, he saw a guard leap to the top of the van. Taking a spread stance and a two-handed grip on his pistol, he hit Solo with a massive neural paralyzer, and just before the stun took effect, Solo thought with surprise that getting back into the tower wasn't going to be difficult at all. Then the whole world became a moment frozen in time.

* * * * * *

The return to consciousness was swift. Han was thankful, not for the first time, that his early training had included the physical and mental discipline necessary to throw off the effects of a stun charge. His mind lept to alertness ahead of his body, waiting and analyzing as his physical senses began to function again.

Dark, but not pitch, a cell in the tower. Shallow breathing nearby. Rian. Willing his muscles to respond, he was gratified at the tingling sensation which began in his extremities. It gave him an idea of his position, which was sprawled inelegantly, probably in a corner.

When he found he could turn his head, he looked for the girl. She was lying a few feet further toward the cell door in the boneless attitude of neural paralysis, her dark hair pooling beneath her on the stone and radiating outward like water.

Her tunic was dirty and torn, and even in the dimness Solo could see her face was bruised. *Poor kid,* he thought. She must have had a bad fall when he swerved the bike to avoid the grenade crater -- and still

"Clear skies."

He nodded, spun on his heel and skipped away over the hull onto the starboard bow mandible then, dropping to swing between the two forward arms, vanished from view.

Ben continued to scan. Chewie monitored. They waited and worried.

* * * * * *

The single guard at the entrance to the computer area was already full of festival wine when Solo approached him, cloak over one arm.

"This where the Magician's Guild is meeting?" he asked.

"Huh? What magicians? You a magician?

"Sure! Watch this!" Solo flourished the cloak, executed a rapid veronica and suddenly whipped it over the befuddled guard's head. He appropriated his lase-rifle and clipped him briskly alongside the head, all in an abrupt swirl of motion that ended with the guard's collapse on the floor. Han dragged the body inside the computer room, stashing it behind a bank of units. Then he set to work.

Rian, meanwhile, had almost reached the tower's top and was despairing of finding the children when she heard the music -- a sad little wail of a baffle pipe. Young Ben's baffle pipe, the one he loved so much that he slept with it.

She held perfectly still, trying to locate the source of the plaintive melody. It led her further along the corridor to an unmarked door. Dropping to her knees she pressed her cheek against the lock with her lips near the keyhole. "Prince Ben," she whispered. The music stopped. Suddenly her heart leapt. What if there was a guard in there with them? Adrenalin coursing, she scarcely dared to move.

There was a rustle on the other side of the door. "Mummy? Is that you?" It was Hana.

"Darling, it's not Mummy. It's Rian. I'm here with Captain Solo and we're going to get you out and take you home to Mummy."

Hana started to cry. "I want to go home now."

"Ben," Rian whispered frantically, "make Hana stop crying. They'll hear you."

Then she heard the little boy saying, "Don't cry, Twink. Rian'll get us out. Here, you can play the baffle pipe ..." and the sobs subsided into sniffles.

Huddled against the door Rian discovered that Twink wasn't the only one whose composure was slipping. She swiped angrily at the moisture under her eyes.

Pulling out the comlink she keyed it open and said in a rush, "I'm very near the top of the tower, outside the children's cell. They're all right for how, but this luck can't hold. There've got to be guards along soon. Han, where are you?"

About a meter behind you," said a voice over her shoulder. "Some commando you make. A herd of nugroots could've snuck up on you."

"Oh! Where have you been?"

"Me? Hanging out in the kitchen. Did you know that this place is fully automated? They've got an archaeologist's dream up here for a prison, and a slicker food prep set-up than the Emperor himself."

As he spoke he shoved the lase rifle into Rian's arms and began compressing another detonator charge., fitting it into the keyhole. "Hey, you kids in there! Get away from the door! Move!"

He waited a moment then set the charge. The door jumped on its hinges and a wisp of smoke curled from the keyhole. The it swung outward.

"Fox! Fox!" chirped Hana, clapping her hands. Her face was dirty and tear-streaked, and she was still in a lacy night-shift. Han wondered angrily if they'd even bothered to feed them -- but she was smiling, and he was glad for that.

Rian was bending down, wiping Ben's smudged face with a corner of her town sleeve, when they heard the sound they'd dreaded all along -- the tramp of booted feet further down the passage.

Grabbing the rifle, Solo gave Hana a gentle push in Rian's direction. "Double quick! Up the tower as far as you can get. Here," he flipped her the third detonator charge. "Whatever it takes, get to the roof."

"Roof?"

"Don't argue. Go!"

Half leading, half dragging the children, Rian hurried off in the direction of the stairs. Solo followed them for a few paces then ducked into the shadow of the stairwell.

The sound of the guards' approach grew louder. When he was certain they'd turned the corner onto his level, he swung out firing, raking the hallway with a burst of energy. Not waiting the assess the extent of the damage, he whirled and took the stairs two at a time. As he did so, answering fire splashed harmlessly off the stairwell beside him.

Sprinting, the agile pilot followed the zig-zag course of the towers' access systems, turning every so often to lay down a field of fire obliging his pursuers to keep their heads down. In this manner he at last reach-the top flight of stairs.

The door leading onto the roof was open. Rian and the children waited in the shadows just to the side of the sunny rectagle.

"Han!" she said nervously, "there's no way to secure it from the outside. I had to use the detonator to blow the lock."

"I'll take care of it. Get the kids over to those balloons."

Her eyes went wide. "You can't mean ... ?"

"Oh, yes, I can. You wanna fight your way back through the hospitality committee, go ahead, but me and the kids are gonna fly!"

"Oooo ... " she began, then found she had nothing to say.

Solo kicked the door shut with a crash just as streaks of lase fire came whistling up the stairs. He aimed several bursts directly at the locking mechanism and several more at the antiquated hinges on the opposite side, fusing what metal there was to the stone of the door jambs. It wouldn't hold them for long, but long enough, maybe..

The balloons were large white bulb-shaped bags swaying gently in the breeze and straining at their moorings. Beneath each was a telemetry unit guyed to the balloon's undercarraige by tough fabric webbing. Rian scrambled onto the telemetry box and Solo put Ben on her lap.

"Where's my daddy?" he wanted to know. The poor little guy was scared to death.

Han took a precious moment to reassure him. "You know that ship I came in with my hairy friend?" Young Ben nodded. "Well, your pop's in that ship right over there." Pointing to where he fervently hoped not only the *Falcon* and her temporary crew, but a fighting mad rebel army were in place. "And they're gonna come and save the day," he finished with more conviction than he felt.

He ruffled the Prince's hair, then faced Rian. The sounds of concentrated fire at the doorway were growing louder. "O.k. it looks like we're gonna BE the attack signal, so hang on..." There was really nothing more to say.

Rian impulsively reached out and touched his cheek. "Good luck," she whispered. Solo nodded, hit the release and immeadiately the balloon began ascending, the wind tugging it out over the parapet and into the upper air.

"Now, Twink, it's just you and me," he told the little readhead. He swung her up onto a telemetry box, released the mooring line and jumped aboard as the baloon lurched upward. He put the girl between his knees, told her to hang on, and then he tangled his left arm in the fabric rigging. Just then the roof door gave way and guards tumbled out into the sunshine. Bracing the laserifle against his shoulder he fired down on them as they balloon cleared the roof and began to sail out over the city.

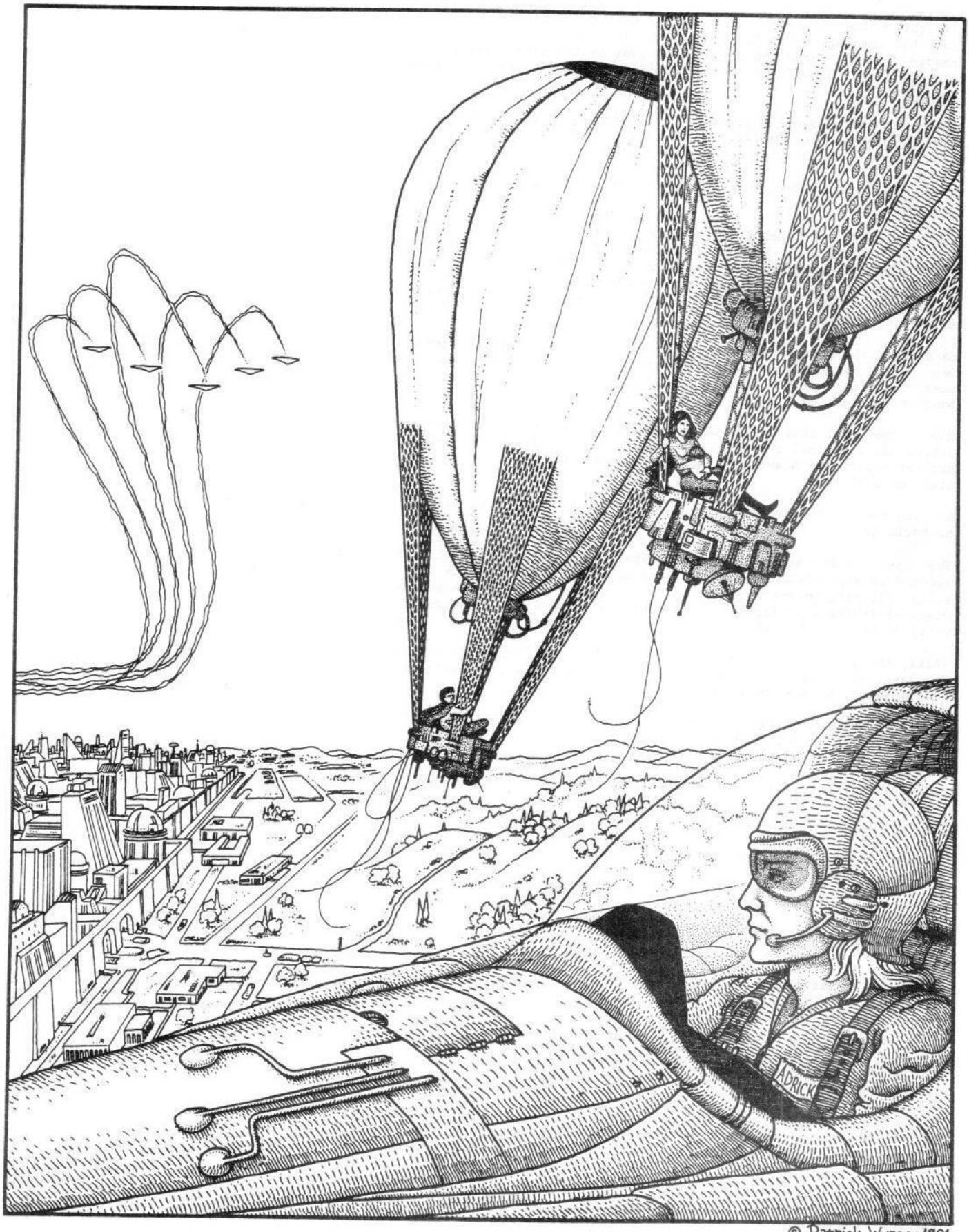
"Chewie!" Ben bellowed, "This is it!"

The Wookiee howled an affirmative as Ben clattered across the hull and dropped through the top hatch. In moments he was in the cockpit, manning the co-pilot's position while Chewie took the main controls. Chewie wuffed a question which Ben thought he understood.

"Yeah, I fly better than I used to. Took a lesson or two."

The Wookiee shook his head, and raised ship while Ben hailed his field commanders and gave the order to attack.

The balloons were high above Adrick-Er, moving slowly toward the hills when Solo's gamble in the computer room paid off. An enormous explosion burst open an entire quarter section of the east palace wing at ground level, smoke and flame belching up from subterranean depths. He jammed the lase rifle into the webbing and used his right arm to hold the little girl close to his chest, sheilding her from the heat and wind of the updraft. "It's O.K., kid. It'll be O.K.," he repeated. Twink seemed impervious to further shock. She knotted her fists in his shirt front and shut her eyes.



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With the *Millennium Falcon* setting the pace, Adrick's rebel air force began to fill the skies to the south. From his vantage point Solo could make out the massed ground effect armored vehicles and troop carriers emerge from the woods and begin converging on the city, long range missiles corruscating before them. It held his attention so that at first he didn't hear the aircraft approaching from the north. Then it was too late.

Someone in the palace had scrambled a squadron of fighters and they bore down on the balloon riders with furious speed. Solo fumbled for the lase rifle, realizing how futile a gesture it was, but determined to go out armed. Twink clung to him like a leech.

He shouted to warn Rian, but the explosions from below and the roar of the incoming slant wings overpowered his voice.

Rian herself was screaming, not daring to let go, long enough to point, but watching some by-play off to the left with either great fear or excitement. Solo twisted around to follow her riveted gaze and saw a sleek scout ship appear out of nowhere, needle-nosed and shining in the late afternoon sun, and at the same moment some trick of the wind shift brought Rian's voice clearly to him. "Randi! Randi!" she cried, and as though her voice could reach the pilot as well, the scout ship opened up against the slant wings with an awesome arsenal of firepower.

He engaged the entire squadron in the most daring and wildly acrobatic display Han had ever witnessed. Despite the danger, he watched with admiration as the blonde youth threw his flashing scout ship into maneuvers worthy of Han himself: attacking, evading, scoring and darting away only to return at once with another well-placed fire barrage.

One of the scout ships broke off suddenly and circled for a shot at Rian's balloon. Randi saw the action and pulled his ship into a vertical mode, firing directly at teh small ship's unshielded exhaust port. He scored but not before the slant wing had torn a projectile hole in the balloon. It began to collapse, losing altitude fast.

At once the scout ship dove to follow it, and Solo wondered uncomprehendingly what the crazy kid thought he could do.

The scout's pilot matched descension speed with the balloon, his ship at right angles to it, then -- and Han shouted in appreciation for his next maneuver -- he flew his ship into the gaping rent in the balloon's side. Piloting on instruments, he vectored south, towing the wounded craft with him. And Han could see Rian, clutching the little boy with one arm, hanging onto the rigging with the other and looking up at the belly of Randi's ship with the most joyous expression he had ever seen.

Still, things might have gone worse had not the *Millennium Falcon* appeared, with several smaller ships in her wake, and sent the remaining slant wings off in a more profitable direction, into the heart of the furious battle going on over the palace.

Solo felt the sudden tug as Chewie engaged a cargo tractor on their telemetry box. Then he shot out the balloon above them to cut drag and, locked together, the big freighter and the very small passenger platform followed Randi's ship.

Solo patted the little girl's head. "It's OK, now, Twink. Your dad's here. Hey! You held on real good!"

Hana opened her eyes, blinked, then snuggled back against the pilot's chest.

Wind whipped tears into their eyes as they sailed in the *Falcon's* wake toward the russet hills to the south, leaving the battle far behind.

* * * * * *

The heroes' welcome following the battle of the escarpment couldn't have held a hand-flash to the one in celebration of the taking of Adrick-Er.

With a brief set-down in a quiet field outside the city to take passengers aboard, the *Millennium Falcon* and Randi's scout ship, *Madrigal*, had flown directly to Sentinel South. Here Ben remained in long distance communication with his rebel generals who were overseeing the mopping up chores in the capitol city.

Seeing which way the wind was blowing the TREC troops, with no particular love for M'Zeel, had retreated in their big interstellar ships aiding neither the Yaniwanes loyal to M'Zeel nor the rebels, in effect fastidiously washing their hands of the whole affair.

Most of M'Zeel's minions had given up: the ones celebrating festival in the palace when they found themselves both outmanned and outgunned and their stronghold exploding beneath them, and the outcountry followers as soon as news of the crushing defeat reached them at their estates.

There was little left for the revel soldiery to do but to station guards to prevent looting, and inform the populace who was now in charge. That he was the rightful heir to the throne, and victor as well, delighted them greatly and the mayor of Adrick-Er proclaimed a two day extension of the festival. Except for enthusiastic carousing, things pretty much came to a halt in that part of Yaniwess for a standard week.

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Han, Chewie, Tella and the twins were relaxing in an apartment just off the communications center, from which Ben's voice carried every so often. Rian and Randi were nowhere to be found, and Han wished them well. The kid had style all right. Han couldn't imagine a better way to repay a life debt and win a lady's hand at the same time. It pleased him to think of Rian helplessly smitten with the dashing Randi Adrick. Women *should* be smitten, and if not with him -- well, Randi would do.

"Oh, yeah? ... Right, I'll tell him." Ben left the console to a lieutenant and strode into the room, stretching and yawning happily. "What a day, Han, what a day." He dropped into a lounger and was immediately covered by wriggling children.

The moment was very mellow.

Chewie growled a query at his partner. "The explosion? Oh, that ... I figured they'd be throwing a big party, and the kitchen's all controlled by computer, so I just made a little change in the program for the banquet, that's all."

"And the change was ... ?" asked Trella, who knew how Solo loved to play out his jokes, especially the really bad ones.

He smiled beatifically. "Number of guests. I told it to fix a sit-down for five million."

"Well," Ben said over the groans, "that explains what happened to M'Zeel. I suppose you ought to know ... you took her out, my friend."

Han was not about to lose sleep over it, but he gave Ben a mildly inquiring look. "Yes," Ben continued. "You see, she was engaged in her favorite sport at the time of the explosion."

"So what? I didn't blow up the jet ball courts, I blew up the kitchen. What's her favorite sport?"

"Eating."

More groans.

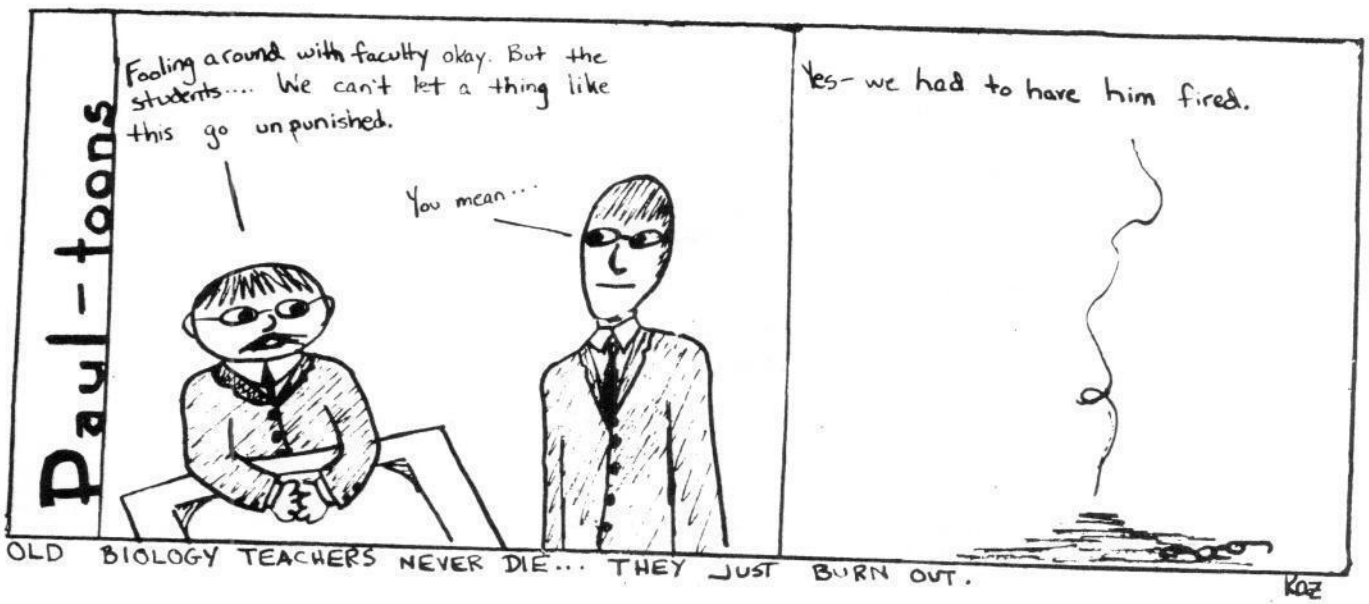
"Han," said Ben, cradling a now-sleeping twin in each arm, "I said it before, and I'll say it again. I owe you. I'm King of Yaniwess. Got a TREC board chair. My kids are safe. What can I give you? I feel expansive. How about an earldom? Would you fancy a viceroyship? Name it!"

"Not on your life, dust-buster! I've had enough of royalty to last me forever." Han laughed lazily. "Twink there's as close to a princess as I ever want to get. No titles ... How about the key to the TREC Control executive washroom?"

"Han, be serious!" said Trella.

Solo turned slowly, looking Trella up and down with an expression of exaggerated incredulity. She subsided, muttering, "I guess that was a stupid thing to say .... "

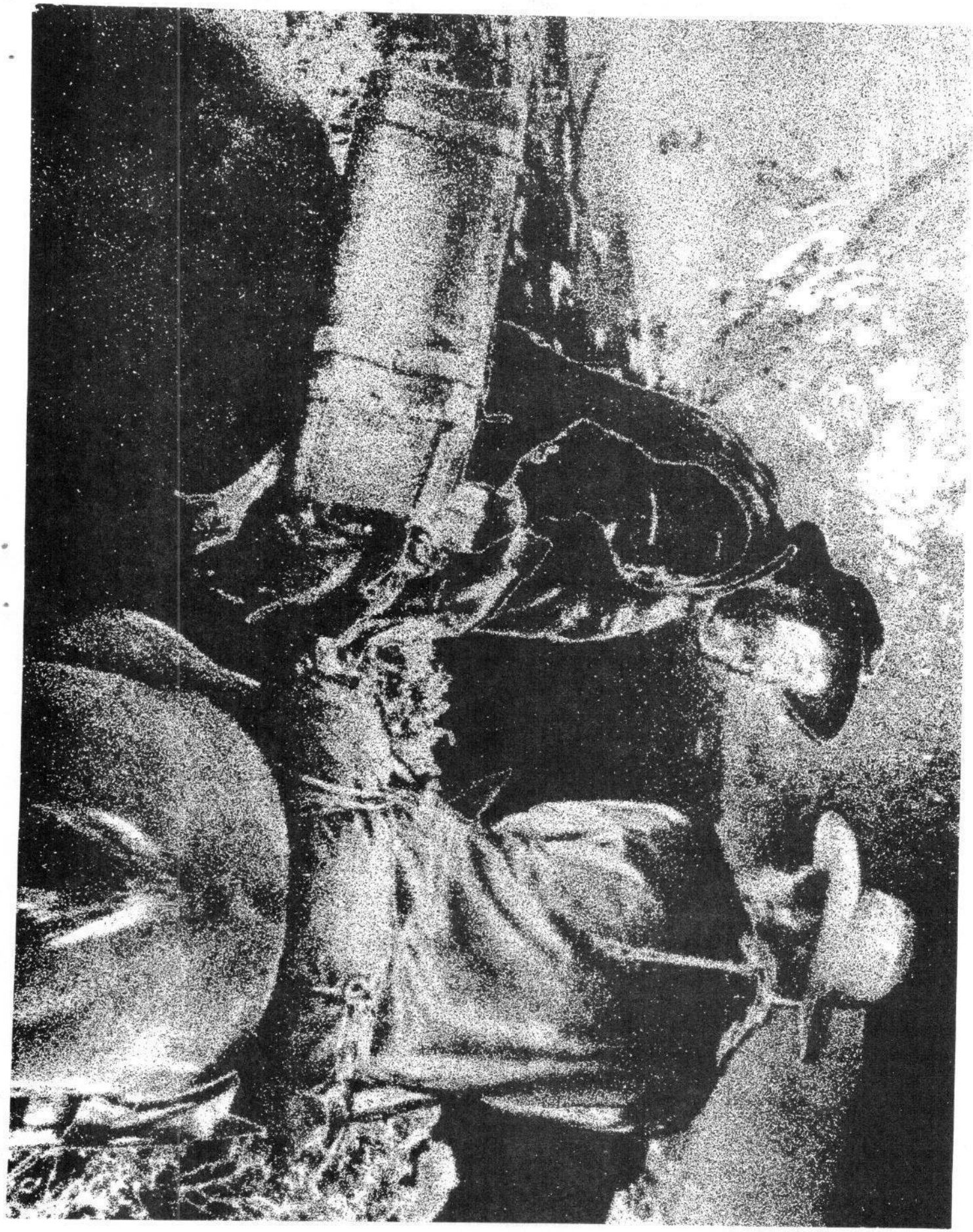
Satisfied that the Queen of Yaniwess was thorougly chastened, the *Falcon's* master returned to a leisurely communion with his Mancet brandy.


Paul-toons
Fooling around with faculty okay. But the students.... We can't let a thing like this go unpunished.
You mean...
Yes- we had to have him fired.
OLD BIOLOGY TEACHERS NEVER DIE... THEY JUST BURN OUT.
KAZ

Two Rode Together

Lynne Terry

Why I ever went along with him,
I'll never know.
Only a crazy man coulda' gone through
all the trouble he did
Just to reach California, an' still
git there in one piece.
'Course, if'n that's true,
then I must be crazy, too.
But someone had to help him!
Alus like a newborn babe--
gettin' into trouble, not knowin'
No better, but always livin' through it.
Don't see how, tho:
Still beats the hell outta' me.
Anyone else woulda' been dead
long 'fore now.
Still, I gotta' admit, we did
have some good times
Out on the trail comin' in
to Frisco,
An' I reckon the good outweighs
the bad.
Avram's a good man;
No wonder God watches out for him--
He's the best there is.
Yeah, we had more'n our share
of troubles and fights,
But I guess that's what makes
us friends--
Our differences.
An' while I ain't makin' no
promises 'bout stayin' in Frisco
Permanent-like,
If'n I <u>did</u> hit the trail again
I'd kinda' like to have Avram
at my side;
'Cause it's more fun when two
ride together.



Just Like Starting Over

Lindsey Nuttal

illustrated by Paulie

Han rummaged in the bathroom, trying to find some Stericool antiseptic and the can of plastispray. In the bedroom, Leia stirred. Han cursed under his breath when he heard her rise. She stuck her head in the door, squinting in the light.

"What, may I ask, are you doing? Do you have any idea what time it is?" Then she gasped as she saw his reflection in the mirror. Fully awake now, she came in. Catching his chin, she turned his face to her.

"Let me alone," Han pulled his chin away. "Its nothing."

"Nothing!" Leia stormed. "You have to make a presentation with me tomorrow, and it's going to be televised. There's no way to hide those bruises. Especially your eye. It's already swollen shut."

"So, I won't go."

"You have to. You're my husband, and the King and Queen have always traditionally made this presentation together." She sighed. "Oh, Han. What's gotten into you lately?"

Han found the Stericool and slathered it over the side of his face, wincing.

"I feel...confined. I just have to get away from all this." He gestured with a handful of the antiseptic foam before applying it to the knuckles of his other hand.

"All this suited you just fine for thirteen years. What's the matter with it now?" she demanded, snatching the plastispray away from him. "Hold still," she ordered, applying the stuff angrily in liberal swathes. "I don't suppose it would have anything to do with the fact that this year will be your fiftieth birthday?"

Han sulked in silence, suffering her none to gentle handling with an air of 'who cares?' Leia stepped back to see if she had covered everything that needed to be covered with the clear spray.

"Was Chewie with you?" she inquired, putting the can back on the shelf.

"No. He wouldn't go. Too afraid of you, if you found out. Traitor," he growled, shrugging out of his torn shirt.

"You didn't go out alone?" Leia whirled around.

"And why not?"

"Han! Not even one guard?"

"Hell, no! They're always getting in the way. Everyone recognizes the palace uniform a mile away and it's just like I never left here. Everyone starts kowtowing and scraping. Can't even pick a fight with them along. Not even with them." He pulled on the silky nightshirt Leia handed him and kicked his boots off.

"Well, maybe you do need a vacation," Leia said as she went to climb back in bed. "Maybe we can take a few days in the mountains."

Han's pants flew out of the bathroom to land in the middle of the room. He raged out after them.

"Mountains!" he yelled. "A few days! Try off this whole bloody planet. For a few months. No! A few years would do, just fine."

Leia jumped up on her knees in the middle of the bed.

"Why don't you go then?" she yelled back. "Go on and go! Don't worry about the government or me or your kids. Just pack up and leave!"

She turned around and punched her pillow a couple of times before burying her face in it. She didn't move as she felt Han get in and jerk the covers up.

"I just might," came his voice. "And I sure ain't goin' on video tomorrow. You did that kinda stuff fine without me before we got married. You don't need me for that."

Leia clenched her jaw to keep from screaming in simple frustration.

"Why don't you get Luke to help you," he continued. "He's better at that sort of thing anyway."

Be calm, Leia told herself. *Humor him. He'll change his mind in the morning.* Aloud she managed to say, "Yes. I might ask him."

After a few moments of shifting around, Han lay on his back, hands behind his head. "Y'know, while your're doing your presentation thing, I think I'll get Chewie and go pull the Falcon out of the hangar. Clean the old girl up a bit and take her for a little run."

Leia sat up suddenly. She grabbed her pillow, jerked the top blanket off the bed and headed for the door.

"Hey!" Han sat up. "Where'ya goin'? You're not mad, are you?"

"Of course not," she said, snatching the bedroom door open. "I always sleep on the love seat in the foyer when I'm thrilled with you." The door slammed shut.

"Aaah, Bantha patties!" Han siged as he punched his own pillow before flopping on it.

A few days later, Han and Luke were sitting on the patio outside the royal apartments. They were sharing a brief break in the Parliamentary procedures.

"Daddy!" a high shriek pierced the air. "Save me, Daddy!"

A little body flew across the patio into Han's lap before he could prepare himself.

"Astry," he groaned through clenched teeth. "How many times do I have to tell you not to jump on gentlemen that way."

"You're not a gennelmun," his youngest at five and half informed him as he set her down on the tiles. "You're just fat old Daddy."

"Thanks, kid. And I love you, too," he snorted. He saw Luke trying not to smile.

"You shut up," he aimed a warning finger at his companion. "Fat or not, I can still wipe that smile off your face pretty quick, boy." Han had gotten quite sensitive about his girth, even though it wasn't much larger than it had ever been.

Her attention diverted, Astry headed for Luke. Knowing from experience he couldn't deter the little girl, Luke quickly crossed his legs and put down his glass.

"Somebody's gotta save me from Hannen, Unca' Luke," she said, clambering into his lap.

"Sure, Astry," Luke enfolded the little girl in his arms as her older brothers came around the hedge. "Looks like he's had to enlist some aid," he grinned.

Lu and Hannen, aged 12 and 9 respectively, marched up to their father.

"Dad," Lu pointed an accusing finger at Astry. "She's got some of our stuff again."

"Do not!" yelled Astry.

"Do too!" Hannen yelled back. He turned to his father. "She's got one of my best shooting stones. One Chewie gave me."

"And she's got one of my miniature ships," added Lu.

"They're mine," Astry struggled indignantly out of Luke's lap and ran to Han.

"I won them fair and square."

"Did not!" Hannen said angrily. "You stood three whole steps closer to the target than we did."

"Target? Have you kids been shooting my blaster without asking permission again?"

The boys hung their heads and didn't answer.

"Well, if you lost you lost. And Astry ought to get three steps. She's littler than you. You just don't want to admit she can outshoot you both. Now get lost."

"Aw, Dad..." Lu started to protest.

"No. Go on. And keep your paws off my blaster!" he called as they scuffed away.

"And you, young lady," he shook his finger at Astry. "You aren't to touch a gun again without me around. Understand?"

"Yeah, Daddy." She pulled at his shirt. "Hold me?"

"No. I'm trying to talk to your Uncle Luke. Leia," he yelled. "Come get this kid. I don't know why she always wants me to hold her," he muttered as he handed Astry over to Leia.

"Same reason I do," Leia informed him. "You're so soft and cuddly..."

"That does it!" yelled the Corellian, pitching his glass out into the gardens. He leaped up and stormed off yelling something incomprehensible.

Luke looked at the startled Leia. Astry had one finger in her mouth, staring after her father in astonishment.

"What was that all about?" inquired the Jedi.

"He's got cabin fever," sighed Leia. "I waited on pins and needles for years for this to happen. Then, just when I decide he's happy and it wasn't going to happen, naturally he has to prove me wrong. Well, if he flies off, he can just go ahead and do it. I'm not going after him." She stalked into the palace with Astry on one hip.

Well, Luke said to himself. *He held out a lot longer than I figured he would. Guess I better go talk to him.*

Luke found the Corellian in the Falcon's special hangar working furiously on the landing gear, muttering the whole time. Luke leaned up against the hull of the ship and carefully composed his face. He drew from the well of Force within himself to heighten his sensitivity to Han's emotions and thoughts.

"Cleaning up the Falcon, huh?" he asked.

"Mm-hm," grunted the Corellian.

"Any particular reason?"

Han mumbled something.

"What? I didn't catch that."

"I said I feel like doin' it," came the surly answer.

"Oh. I thought maybe you were going to fly her somewhere."

Han stopped and glared at Luke. "I might. I just might." He threw down his wrench and snatched up a probe.

"Well, if you do, would you mind letting us know where you go?"

"And why should I? I'm a grown man. I don't need a lot of uniformed nursemaids following me around. I'm not over the hill yet. Oh-No, not me."

"If you took...a little trip, where would you go?"

"Wherever I wanted to. Just like the old days."

"Yeah," smiled Luke. "A new system every few stellar days because you either ran into stormtroopers, old debts, old friends, or forgot you had a price on your head..."

"Aaah, shaddap!" muttered the Corellian.

Luke knew from reading Han that his friend was planning to slip away, soon. He went to talk with Leia, leaving Han tinkering with the Falcon's underside.

After Han had finished his revamping on the Falcon, he spent a couple of days just being with his family. Leia could sense a difference in the way he kissed, or even touched her or the kids. She didn't need Luke to tell her what was going on. After thirteen years, she knew well enough.

The third day, Han moved the old ship out onto the hangar pod. He prepared a letter to his family, principally Leia, and brought it into the bedroom. He left it on Leia's pillow while she was attending a court function.

"Hope I explained why I have to do this," he said as he laid the folded paper down. "I know no explanation will ever be enough. I'm still running out, I guess." He knelt by the bed and lay his cheek against Leia's pillow. "Forgive me, anyway, Leia," he whispered. "Leia. Love." He kissed the pillow and rose. He took one last look around the room, at the combined jumble of their living. Blinking back an unaccustomed wetness from his eyes, he fled, dragging a full duty bag with him. He passed the children's quarters at a near run. There was no way he could face a good-bye or a pause in those quarters.

On board the Falcon, he asked for takeoff clearance.

"Oh," the comptroller's voice sounded tinny over the com. "Taking your old ship out for a nostalgia run, Your Majesty? Enjoy yourself."

"I intend to, if you'll give me clearance, twerp," he growled back.

"Oh," the voice sounded startled. "Yes sir. Clearance at 01300. Five minutes."

"Thanks," he snapped.

He spent the longest five minutes that ever reeled off a chronometer before savagely punching the engines up. The Falcon surprised him by grumbling to life with only a moment's hesitation.

"Well," he half-smiled. "It's nice to know you're eager too. Here goes."

The old ship leaped into the air smoothly, as she had always done. For once, everything seemed to work.

"It should," the ex-king snorted. "With the best mechanics in the galaxy at my disposal, you sure as hell better work right."

He got a good distance from the planet before punching in co-ordinates for a system he hadn't seen in fifteen years. He leaned back, his hand on the hyper-drive lever, and shut his eyes.

A soft voice said, "Co-pilot reporting for duty, Captain Solo."

"What!" he nearly jumped out of his skin. "Leia!" he gasped, leaning back again with on hand over his pounding heart. "You scared the peedoodle outta me! Son-of-a-gundark! What are you doing here?"

"Serves you right," she declared. "For trying to run out on me."

"I ain't goin' back," he said angrily. "No amount of talking is gonna get you anywhere, so you might as well not start."

"Did I say anything about going back?" she settled more comfortably into the co-pilot's chair.

"You mean...you mean, you intend to go with me?"

"Of course. I have to keep close enough track of you to bury you when you make that final, fatal mistake."

"Never," he grinned. Then sat bolt upright. "What about the government?"

"What about it?"

"Well, who's going to run it?"

"Lu, of course, when he's old enough. 'Til then, I left strict orders for my cousin, Kiri..."

"The Force lady Luke found?"

"The Force Mistress," she corrected him. "Yes. I left her orders to corner Luke Skywalker once and for all and marry him. After all, he's past the age you were when we got married. It's about time he settled down. He and Kiri will act as Regents for Lu, for Luke, until he's crowned. He wanted to go to the Junior Academy next season, and since that's only a month or so away, I gave him permission to go ahead."

"Hannen. What about him?"

"He was terribly torn between wanting to follow his father and learn to be a space pirate, or..."

"Or?"

"Or doing what he finally did. Apprenticing to his Uncle Luke in the Way."

"As a Jedi?" Han was flabbergasted.

"Yes. He's such a mixture of little boy and serious young man. He asked Luke to test him a few months ago. Luke said he showed a very good aptitude. He left it to Hannen to broach the subject with you, since he didn't know how you would feel about it. Hannen never had time to get up the nerve. Before you blow up," she warned, "remember, his grandfather studied with Obi Wan."

But Han was gazing out the viewscreen into space with no signs of blowing up.

"My son," he said wonderingly. "A Jedi knight."

"Now, Han. Luke said he showed aptitude. We don't know if Hannen can develop into a Jedi knight."

"He will," the Corellian nodded. "I know he will." He didn't shift his gaze from the viewscreen. "Astry?" the name caught in his throat and he cleared it roughly.

"What was that?" Leia asked, trying to hide a smile. "I didn't hear you."

"Astry," he said sharply. "What happened with Astry?"

"Well," sighed Leia. "That was a problem I couldn't seem to find any way around."

"Leia!" he turned to her. "You didn't?"

"Mommy?" called a little voice.

They turned to see Astry leaning into the control room. She had on the smallest flight suit Han had ever seen.

"I know you said not to come in 'til Daddy quit yelling, but I'm tired of being in here all by myself and he hasn't even stated yet!"

Han shook his head at Leia. "What am I going to do with the two of you?"

"Put us to work, I guess," she smiled. "You tried to be a good husband and king for thirteen years. Now I guess it's my turn to try to be a good...smuggler is it? Or mercenary? And don't think it was as easy for me to make this decision as it was for you live as you have until now. I was ready to let you go alone and have you blasted out of the sky if you ever came back, at one point?"

"You would have, too. Why did you change your mind?" I just knew if I suggested that you leave, you'd never do it."

Leia shrugged. "Things just happen to be going well, now. And it won't be long until Lu is crowned. We don't do that much anyway. Luke has really handled all the off planet things and...and..."

"Couldn't stand the thought of me maybe finding another woman, huh?" Han grinned wickedly.

Leia's cheeks flushed and she glared at him.

"Mommy!" insisted Astry, still in the doorway.

"Come on, Astry," laughed Han. "I'm not going to yell. I should. I should also turn this hunk of junk around and take you both right back home."

"Daddy!" Astry hit him.

"Ow!" he hollered in surprise as she pounded his arm again with her chubby fist.

"Don't you dare call the Falcon names. She's not junk. She's be-yoo-tee-ful."

Laughing again, he gathered the little girl into his lap. "Have it your way, kid."

"Ooooh!" She regarded the control panel with delight. "Which button does what, Daddy?"

"You just sit right here and I'm gonna show you how to fly the fastest hunk...I mean the fastest and most be-yoo-tee-ful ship in the galaxy. You take this hyper-drive lever and pull it down...that's right. All the way..."

INDY

SARA FENSTERER

Who's running down the streets of the city,
Cracking a whip that cuts through the air?
Facing the snakes which ain't very pretty,
Everyone knows it's Indy!

Who's got to get the Ark from the bad guys,
Who needs the Staff of Ra to get there?
Who sees the lightning flash through the dark skies?
Belloq, beware! It's Indy!

Chorus: And Indy has hazel eyes
That gleam for his treasured prize.
And Indy hates Belloq's lies
As much as the snakes--as much as the snakes!

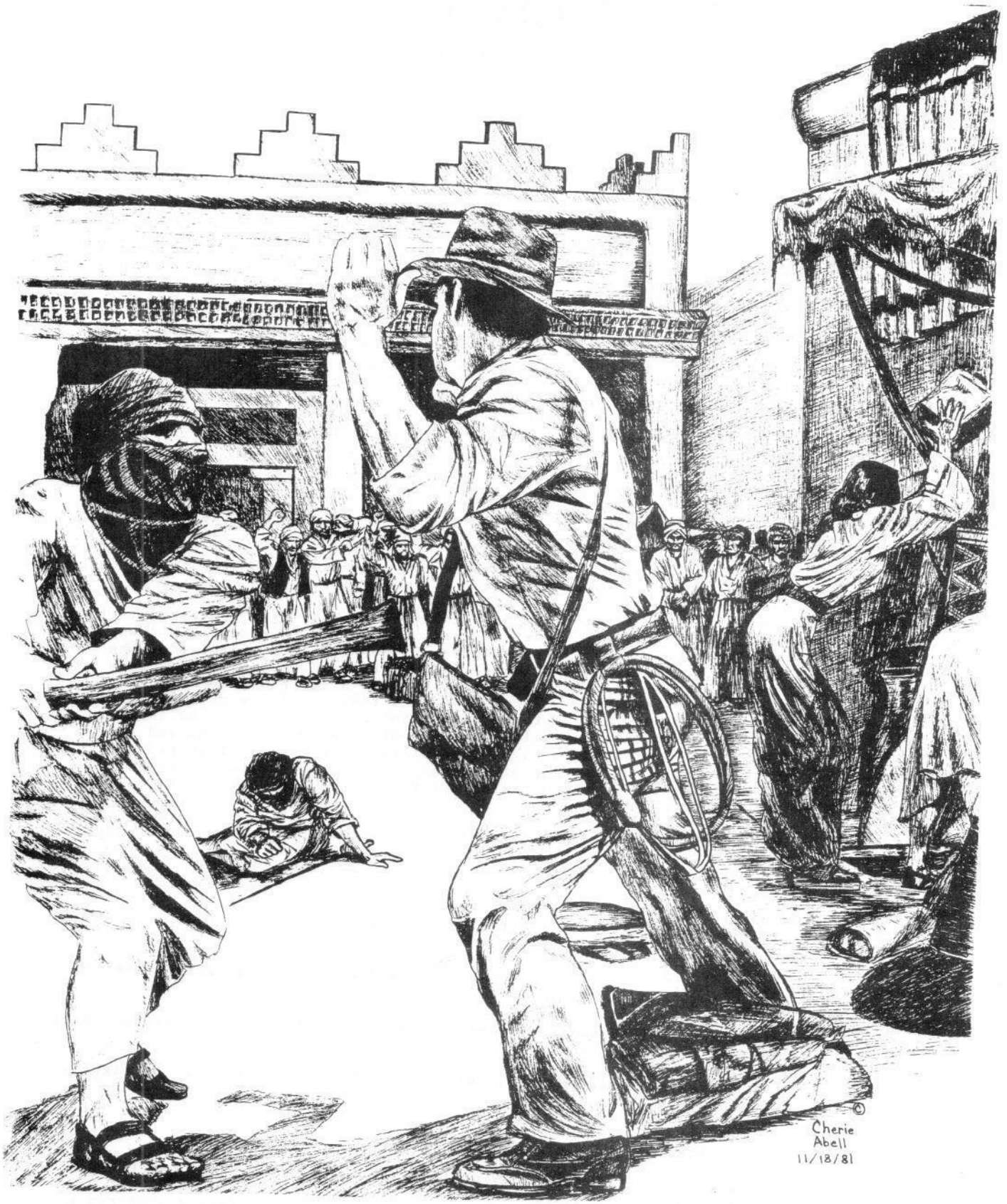
Sallah's the friend who's helping old Indy,
He'll stick with him, whatever the fate
Someone would try to poison you, Indy,
Everyone knows they're "bad dates."

Then there's a girl who's got the medallion
Partners with Jones through scrapes of all kinds.
Ravenwood's child is one in a million.
Marion still loves Indy.

Chorus: Oh, Indy, you've got to try
Remember to shut your eyes.
Oh, Indy, the Ark's the prize--
But close your eyes--oh, close your eyes!

Who's teaching students back in his classroom,
Where all the girls just sit there and sigh.
Professor Jones adventures still call you.
Everyone knows it's Indy!

(Music from "Windy" by The Association)


Cherie
Abell
11/18/81

Gunhand of Fate

J.A. Berger

illustrated by Martynn and Gee Moaven

I.

A match flared in the dark room and moved in silent disembodiment across the briefly outlined desk, paused, while a hand lifted the globe from the lamp, then touched the darkened wick bringing the room to life. Dark shadows receeded before the yellow light of the kerosene fed flame and the hand, attached to a blue uniformed arm, replaced the globe.

Captain Zachary Wingate, Commanding Officer of Fort Scott, Arizona Territory, was a man rapidly leaving middle age, a big man who held his six foot stature with a pride and dignity to do justice to the army uniform he had worn for most of his adult life. He moved away from the desk, his movements slow, weary, thoughtful. Stopping before a small fireplace at the end of the room, he banked the hot embers, bringing the flames to life before carefully feeding fresh fuel to the fire. The orange flames licking hungrily at the dry mesquite and weathered scrub oak, the fragrance of desert sage filling the small room.

Wingate reached into his pocket and pulled out a cheroot, his eyes staring into the mounting flames, his round, weather-beaten face outlined in the glow of the fire. From long habit, the officer bit off the tip and rolled the smoke contentedly over his tongue before clamping strong teeth about it. He made no move to light it.

Regaining his feet, he turned from the warmth of the fire and moved back to his desk. The knot of tension continuing to tighten at the thought of the man he awaited.

The man would come. He would sit in the empty chair before the desk, putting his booted feet on the edge while dark, amused eyes dared Wingate to order them down. The act had become a ritual, a show of belligerency towards the discipline of the service and the acknowledgement of a friendship that had been painfully nurtured between a professional gunslinger and an officer who had hired him as undercover trouble-shooter for the United States Army. This time there would be no sharing of thoughts, no give and take over a job to be done. Tonight, Wingate knew he would have to fight--to plead--if necessary, for the life of a man he wanted hanged for crimes against the U.S. Government, a fight against the cold, deadly intentions of another who desired to kill in the name of revenge. It was a struggle he did not welcome and one, he feared, he could not win. But for the soul of the man he called friend, he would have to try.

A soft knock sounded on the heavy oak door. Wingate reached for the lamp and lowered the flame. The room darkened.

"Come."

In the faint illumination of the firelight a tall man entered and silently shut the door behind him.

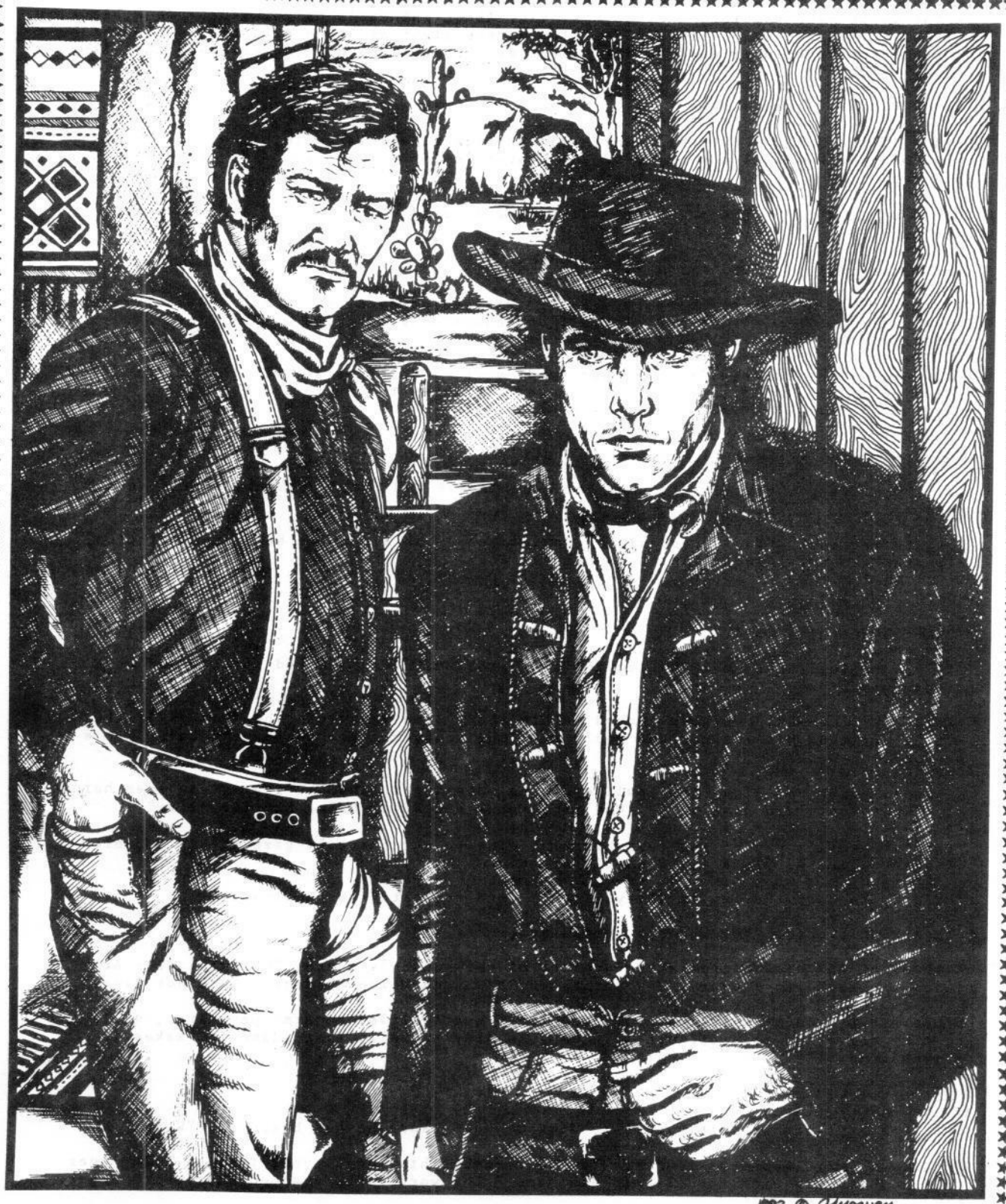
"I've been expecting you." Wingate lifted the wick, and the darkness receeded before the artificial light.

Strange, gray-green eyes glittered from under the shadowed brim of a dark stetson with the cold hardness of tempered steel.

"Cord. Sit down." It was a gentle request, not a command, as Wingate read the tightly coiled anger within the tall man.

Silence fell over the room broken only by the snap and pop of moisture hitting the fire from hidden pockets in the burning mesquite.

Left-handed, the man pulled the stetson from his head exposing a head of thick black hair, long over small ears, with a tendency to curl on the back of his neck. Thick side-burns extending to his earlobes added to the strikingly sharp features of the man who was aged in violence and distrust past his actual years. He fingered the brim with obvious indecision, and Wingate's attention focused on his hands; strong, long-fingered, well cared-for hands, hands made to handle a gun.



'CORD TURNED AWAY FROM THE OFFICER.'

The man called Cord wore a black leather jacket, tucked into dark trousers, encircled at the waist by a rawhide, buckle-less belt. About the man's narrow hips rode a black, well-oiled, much-used holster, pushed low on the right side and strapped to his thigh. In the cut-away holster nestled the walnut grip to a Remington .44 revolver 1851 Army Issue.

"Cord. Please. There's time."

Cord stiffened at the officer's words and strange fires flared in his eyes. "Cap'ain, we've had our words at the medic's. The bastard's layin' sign and I don't intend to lose him."

"Don't do it this way, Cord. Wait." Wingate whispered. "At least until the detail gets back."

"And waste more time? No."

"Listen, Mister, I want the bastard, too." Wingate stepped behind his desk and reached for his chair. "Now, we've got a detail out there on fresh sign and my Pimas are the best trackers in the territory. They'll get him."

"Cap'ain," the gunslinger's voice was deep, soft, a voice as strangely suited to him as the strange eyes that now seemed focused within to the depths of his anger. "He's got three horses. He won't try to hide his trail."

Wingate paused halfway to his seat. "What?"

"He'll relay--put as much distance between himself and the Pass as two horses can take him."

Wingate sat down. "You're guessin'." He commented but his voice held no conviction, his mind already formulating the possibilities.

"No."

"They'll get him, Cord."

"If you believe that, then my leaving's no problem." Cord settled the stetson back on his head.

"Cord, wait! Damit!" Wingate jumped to his feet, leaning across the desk as if the verbal force of his voice alone could stop the younger man. "Don't make this into a personal vendetta!"

A muscle tightened along the jawline of the gunslinger, and the gray-green eyes hardened. "What would you have me do, Cap'ain? Track him down? Bring him in? Alive?"

"That's what I'm payin' you for, Mister." Wingate met the cold gaze of his trouble-shooter squarely. "This job's no different."

"Paid to laundry the Army's dirty linen," Cord commented sarcastically.

Wingate stiffened. "You got any complaints, Mister?"

A touch of mischief pulled at the corner of the gunman's mouth. "Not when it's Army linen I'm asked to laundry," he hesitated; his deep voice hardened. "And not mine."

Wingate swore under his breath. "Cord, the bastard killed an Army paymaster, stole an Army horse and rode off with $10,000. in Army payroll! That, damn it, makes it Army business!"

"And McGuire?"

The statement was so softly voiced, Wingate was unsure he had heard it. "What?"

"McGuire," Cord repeated louder. "You do remember him, don't you? The man lying over at the infirmary with a bullet in his back." The words were snapped short with anger.

"McGuire's a civilian." Wingate crushed the stub of his cheroot under his bootheel, the smoke gnawed to a stub from his anger and frustration.

"And my friend." Cord finished.

"I understand that."

"Do you?" There was a bite to the words that had not been there before.

"Yes, damn it, I do! Probably better than you. I remember how it was..two years ago... when you first rode in here, trying to fight the whole world with that .44 of yours, unable to believe there was a man on this earth you could trust.

Wingate wearily dropped his gaze before the hard, unreadable eyes of the gunslinger. "I don't want to see you like that again...but that's where you're headin', Mister, if you turn this into a revenge trip." He sought the younger man's eyes and held them with the sincerity of his words, "You bring him in..alive and I'll see him hanged. You have my word on that."

"This..thing..we're talkin' about, Cap'ain, shot down two men from ambush! Took their horses..guns..and left them for dead in Apache country. One man has died." Cord's voice faltered, "McGuire may not make it through the operation..."

"He stole $10,000 in Army payroll," Wingate reminded him, "Men have killed for far less than that, my friend."

The muscle jumped again at the gunman's jawline as Cord clenched his teeth against building fury. "That payroll was a damn windfall, Cap'ain, and we both know it! It was ahead of schedule. He couldn't have know about it." Cord drew a deep breath, but it did little to relieve the anger in his voice, only tempered it with a deadly coldness. "I found his camp, when I found..them. Just off the trail, where they were ambushed. It was one man. Alone. My guess on his way to the gold fields and looking for a quick grubstake."

"If that's true, Cord, it's gonna be a long trail and he'll have a good day's start on you with three horses."

"That's why I'm leaving now. My horse is saddled and ready."

"What about McGuire?" Wingate reminded him softly.

"Wright's a damn good medic. He'll do what he can. My stayin' won't change his chances." He held Wingate's gaze with his own. "I'm not lettin' the bastard get away with this, Cap'ain."

"Cord, I'm not askin' you to." Wingate stated firmly, trying to keep the tenor of command from his voice. "I'm askin' you to bring him in..to hang..for what he's done."

"I'll do what I have to do." The strange eyes smoldered with rapidly building fires.

Wingate drove a fist down hard on the top of the desk, "Damn it, Cord, don't kill the wrong man! You're mad. And you're not thinkin' straight!"

"I'll get the right man."

There was a certainty in Cord's voice that surprised Wingate. "How?" He challenged.

"McGuire saw him...for a moment..before..."

"It's a dark night! What the hell kind of a description could he have given you?"

"Enough. I've trailed men on less."

"What have you got?" Wingate pressed. "I want to know."

"Six foot. Lean. Packs a belt-gun and a right-hand rig...ridin' a Texas branded horse with Texas trappings."

"Hair? Eyes?"

Cord shrugged. "Like you said, Cap'ain, it's a dark night."

"Cord, it's not enough."

"It's all I've got! It'll have to be enough."

Cord turned away from the officer, crossed to the door and lifted the latch. As the door opened under his hand, the sound of riders met their ears. "The detail's back."

Wingate hurried to his Trouble-Shooter's side and they moved out to the covered veranda that looked over the parade grounds of Fort Scott.

"Empty-handed," Cord stated simply.

Wingate swore as he saw the two lathered, weary saddle horses led by his scouts. There was no sign of the man who had ridden them. "Why in hell are you always right," he grunted. "I don't recognize the buckskin."

"It's the horse McGuire described. It's wearing a Texas rig," Cord pointed out. "The gray's Murphy's..."

Wingate nodded quick understanding, "Then..."

"He's ridin' McGuire's bay."

"He's got a damn good start, Cord. From the looks of those horses, he didn't bother to stop to shift gear, but changed horses express-stype, turnin' 'em loose when he went to the fresh animal."

"And he saved the strongest..best traveller..for last. He knows horses. McGuire's bay is one of the best there is."

"You still think you can find him?"

"That bay carries an Apache brand and Mexican trappings, it won't go unnoticed the further north he goes. It'll take time, but as long as he keeps the bay, I'll find him."

Wingate made no further objections as the gunslinger stepped off the porch and mounted the short-coupled sorrel tied there.

Cord tightened his rein and the powerful gelding side-stepped nervously, sensing the rider's eagerness.

"Bring him in, Cord. Let the law try him. He'll hang. I promise you."

"He's got a gun, and it's obvious he knows how to use it." Cord commented dryly, his deep voice hard. "He'll get his chance."

"Against you, Cord?" Wingate questioned. "I've known few men who'd have a chance... with a gun...against you, Mister."

The sorrel danced away from the porch.

"It's more of a chance than he gave Murphy...or McGuire."

Wingate swore helplessly, watching his Trouble-Shooter set spurs to the sorrel and move past the detail.

"Captain?"

Wingate pulled his gaze away from the departing rider and turned toward Sergeant-Major Murdock. "John."

"He got away from us, Sir. We had no trouble tracking him, he made no effort to hide his trail, but..."

"He out ran you," Wingate finished, weariness heavy in his voice. "He relayed with his and Murphy's animals, then changed to McGuire's bay, headed northwest."

"How?!" Murdock looked strangely at his commanding officer then at the disappearing rider. "Oh, Cord."

"Yeah," Wingate sighed, "Cord. He called every shot."

"He'll find him." Murdock glanced at Wingate knowingly, "but will be bring him back?"

"If this had happened to anyone but McGuire, I could answer that." Wingate pulled another cigar from his pocket, "Cord's a good man with a lot of bad luck in his past. With McGuire's friendship he's learned that not every drawn gun is pointed in his direction." He clamped angry teeth onto the fresh smoke and reached for a match. "I hope the bastard he's trailin' doesn't do anything dumb..."

"Like go for his gun," Murdock finished.

Wingate shot Murdock a murderous glare. "Cord'll bring him in, if he can. I have to believe that."

Murdock shook his head in disagreement while Wingate touched flame to his smoke. "I keep remembering the man Cord was two years ago. He scared hell out of me." Murdock admitted, wetting suddenly dry lips with a nervous tongue. "I guess...at times, like now...he still does."

He stared out across the desert toward the western mountains the last of the stars rapidly fading. "He'll find the man who shot McGuire. And when he does," Murdock

paused as if a sudden thought had momentarily silenced him. "God help the man he finds riding McGuire's bay 'cause he'll get no mercy from Cord...just hot lead."

II.

Angel's Camp's muddy thoroughfare was clogged with all the conveyances known to her teeming population: supply wagons, their dray-teams struggling under their loads, rented and leased buggies and pack animals of all sizes and colors. Men crowded hastily constructed boardwalks pushing and shoving, shoulder to shoulder with fellow humans, all sharing common space and common dreams of great wealth. Easterners rubbing elbows with Westerners..would be miners all...in their quest for gold.

Among them, trying to keep the grime and filth of the tent town and her grubbier inhabitants off of his newly purchased suit, strolled a displaced cowboy. Shed of his linen shirt, vest and cattlemen's togs, one would have been hard-pressed to recognize the clean shaven, sharply dressed man for the trail worn traveller who had ridden in the week before.

Tommy Lillard stopped at the edge of the unfinished walkway and glanced forlornly across the deeply rutted, muddy excuse for a street, jumping back as a lumber wagon rumbled by sending a sheet of rain water and slush showering his way. He grumbled as the last of the deluge landed on his freshly polished boots.

A cry went up from the crowd massing across the way and he glanced quickly up the street. The lead team of the expected coach made the turn in his direction,its leather shocks rocking the conveyance gently as it rounded the corner behind the flying heels of the six-horse hitch.

The condition of his footware forgotten at the sight of the coach, Lillard awaited his opportunity then crossed in front of the careening coach, reaching the opposite side as the bearded driver hauled back hard on the reins and kicked on the brake. The leather bound brakes contacted with the rear wheels and the big coach ground to a halt.

Tommy shook his head in disbelief at the teem of humanity clinging to the coach. The roof, usually reserved for the larger pieces of luggage, was covered with seated men clinging to the small railing that circled the roof. One passenger had managed to find a crowded seat between the driver and the shotgun guard. The small, wizened man, looking much the worse for the trip, his eastern clothing streaked with trail dust and the flecks of dried saliva from the head-tossing coach horses.

A crooked smile pulled at the corner of Lillard's mouth as he pushed his way to the offside and wrenched the door open, stepping aside while a Fargo employee rushed forward to put the wooden steps under the opened door.

"Just a minute, folks, just a minute." The man pleaded, lost amid the pressing crowd.

"Tommy!"

Lillard broke into a wide grin at the muffled but familiar voice from inside the coach. Impatiently, he pushed the Fargo man aside, kicked the steps into place and stepped aside as the passengers alighted. He struggled to keep himself next to the coach while he searched for the familiar face of his friend.

A moment later, Avram Belinsky stepped from the coach and was grabbed in a bear-hug by the tall, lean Texan.

"Hi, Cuz, sure glad to set eyes on ya again. Here, here..." he pulled the bearded man through the crowd that surrounded them and stopped next to the weary coach-horses. "Let me get a good look at ya." He laughed. "Yeah, married life is treatin' ya good."

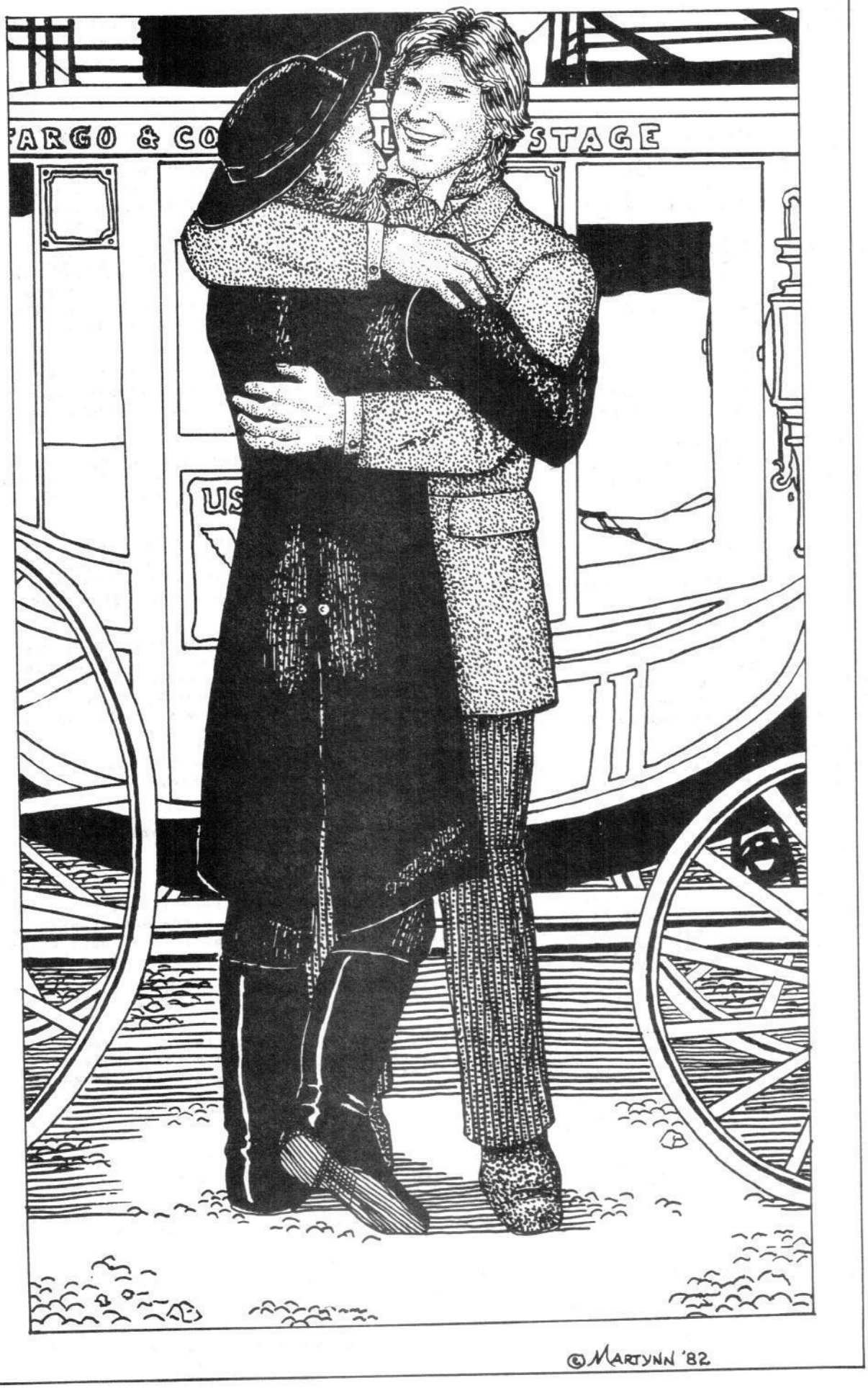
A gentle smile broke through the beard and Avram reached for the arm of his friend. "And you...you look like a gentleman."

"Me ? A gentleman?" The infectious grin pulled at Tommy's mouth. "I've been called a lot of things in my time, Pard, but never a gentleman. These duds cost me a bundle, worth it though, just to see the look on your face."

The Rabbi's pale-blue eyes softened with the light of friendship. "It has been a long time...Cuz."

Tommy slapped him good-naturedly on the back."Nah, what? Six months? Hell, Avram, that ain't no time out here. How was your trip?"

"Good. Good." Avram articulated carefully. "It is a big country, Tommy, this beautiful America. But so young..so violent! And such strange names for the towns. I have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been to Gold Run, Foresthill, Pilot Hill, Placerville, El Dorado, Fiddletown and now Angel's Camp..." He grew serious. "I have seen no angels."

"Growin' pains, Cuz, just give her time. How was the ride?"

"Long," Avram replied honestly, grinning sheepishly at the laughter in Lillard's hazel eyes. "Why so many horses to pull one wagon?" He gestured to the teams standing hip-shot behind them. "In Poland we used half as many to pull far more weight."

"Yeah? Bet Poland don't have these mountains..and the washouts that have to pass for roads." The Texan reached out and patted the dusty rump of the nearest animal. "It's called a 6-up or a 6-hoss hitch. The driver puts his two heaviest horses..the best pullers--in the first span. The Wheelers. They're picked for strength, not speed." He motioned to the two bays harnessed in the next span, "They're the Swing, usually young horses learning' the trade. They can't do much in the middle but take up the slack and follow. The front hitch's the Leaders. They're the lighter, better trained team. The better the Leaders, the better your team."

Avram glanced from the stomping horses to his friend. "You know all this...from being a chowboy?"

Tommy laughed, pleased at Avram's reference to his knowledge, "I learnt all that from being a teamster." He reached out and pulled the off-wheeler's mane free from the collar and smoothed it down. "It's a hard, dirty job...long hours and little pay."

"But honest pay." Avram commented softly.

"Don't you start on that. Come on, lecture's over, let's hang on the feedbag, then I'll show you where we're stayin'."

"Wait!" Avram turned back to the coach. "I must get my things."

"We can pick it up later, when the crowd thins." Tommy objected.

"No," Avram refused. "I will get my luggage now."

Tommy sighed but followed his friend into the crowd now moving toward the boot of the Fargo coach. "The Torah? Right?"

"No. I just want my things," Avram explained patiently. "The Torah is in San Francisco with my people."

"Thank God," Tommy mumbled under his breath.

III.

"Ah," Avram moaned in contentment as he eased his belt and fell in step with the long-strided Texan. "So much food. I have not had such a meal since I left San Francisco. And kosher!" He shook his head in amazement. "Here?!"

"Why not 'here', Cuz?" Tommy questioned. "There'd be no need for you to circuit ride the camps if you were the only Jew."

"But the cost? For one meal! You should not have spent so much!"

"Forget it."

In the darkness the bearded Rabbi could not see the smile fade from his friend's face, but the light, easy camaraderie had left Lillard's voice.

"How can all these people pay such prices?"

"Most of 'em camp at their diggings," Tommy explained gruffly. "They stock the necessaries: salt, flour, coffee, maybe some jerky, then supplement with fresh meat bought from camp hunters." There was a hardness in the Texan's voice Avram had not detected earlier. "The people makin' money in these camps ain't the miners, Avram, it's the camp followers; merchants selling their stock for 300% profit, the shysters selling phony mining shares and salted mines to people who don't know no better, and the professional gamblers."

Avram looked about the crowded tent town, her blemishes hidden by the glow of karosene lamps hung at the entrances to each canvas dwelling. He pointed to the largest. "What is that?"

Lillard shifted uneasily. "That's what passes for a saloon, Cuz. Come on, let's get back to our boardin's."

"A saloon? In a tent?" There was obvious curiousity in the Rabbi's voice as several men appeared in the opening. Boisterously singing, they staggered onto the boardwalk and disappeared into the crowd. "I don't think those fellers are a hundred percent."

"Where 'ave I heard that before?" Tommy mumbled, attempting to steer his friend clear of the establishment.

"The saloon is the largest tent in town..." Avram observed in puzzlement. "And there is more than one..."

"Yeah," Tommy agreed reluctantly, "'bout every dozen tents, or so, I guess. If the camp lives past the usual 6-8 months they'll be the first frame buildings to go up."

"Before the churches?" Regret touched Avram's voice.

"In the camps, Cuz, <u>everything</u> goes up before the churches." Tommy glanced at his friend. "I don't think God wants anything to do with the camps."

"Lillard."

Tommy stiffened noticably at the strange voice.

A man crossed the street towards them, the faint light from a lamp behind them reflected from the tin star on his vest.

"I see your friend's arrived."

"Tommy?" Avram glanced from one man to the other, sensing something hostile between them.

"Avram, this is Sheriff Toleman. He's what passes for Law here in Angel's Camp."

"Easy, Lillard," Toman cautioned. "We've had our words. I don't want any more trouble."

"Then why don't you find another part of this slum-hole to patrol," Tommy suggested. "We're breaking no laws."

"I'll do that," Tolman agreed. "After I hear when you're leavin' town."

Tommy, hazel eyes hard with indignation, stiffened. "I'm showin' my friend the sights... such as there are."

"I want you out of town, Lillard, by noon tomorrow or that trouble of yours may become real serious. Hangin' serious. Do I make myself clear?"

"I didn't start it, Sheriff, and there's witnesses that'll back me."

"No," Toleman agreed. "But you finished it, Mister. This camp don't need..or want.. your kind around."

"Anything else?" Tommy's voice was hard.

Avram, sensing the anger in his friend, stepped between them. "Sheriff, if there is some problem, I'm sure I could..."

"Stay out of this, Cuz."

"But Tommy..."

"Better listen to your friend, Stranger." Toleman commented, not unkindly. "Remember, Lillard, noon's your deadline. Five minutes past and I'm serving that warrant."

Toleman touched fingertips to the brim of his stetson, "Enjoy your evening, Gentlemen."

Avram watched in puzzlement as the man stepped off the boardwalk and moved into the crowds. "What have we done?"

"Nothing. It's nothing, forget it."

"But he seems very determined to..."

"Come on. It's late and I'm tired."

"But Tommy, how can we leave tomorrow?" Avram lengthened his stride to keep in step with the Texan. "The coach for San Francisco does not leave for almost a week!"

"I said forget it," Tommy snapped, then sighed at the wounded indignation on his friend's face. "Sorry, Cuz, I didn't mean that. Look, you know the law and me never could see eye to eye...I tend to bring out the worst in anyone wearin' a badge."

Avram wisely kept silent.

They crossed the street to the part-tent, part lean-to which connected a row of individual tents serving as a boarding house, passing several open to the cool night air before stopping at their own. Tommy pushed back the flap and stepped inside, his hand covering the butt of his belt-gun until he was sure the tent was unoccupied. A match flared and he touched flame to the lamp wick, closed the globe and hung it from the hook fashioned at the center of the tent post.

"Will you get in here and tie down the flap...'fore a draft blows out the light."

The Rabbi entered the tent, closing the flap and crossed to the bunk where his carpet bag lay. He sat down. "Tommy, what are we going to do?"

"We're gonna get a good night's sleep." Tommy mumbled in irritation. "These bunks ain't much, but you'll think they're feather beds after the jostlin' you got on that coach today."

Lillard pulled off the tailored suit-coat, folded it and laid it across the foot of his bunk. He unbuttoned the matching vest, exposing the pistol, shoved into the waist-band of the trousers, and pulled it free. He checked the loads. It joined the coat on the bunk. Aware of Avram's gaze, he paused. "Will you quit that."

"I'm not doing anything."

"Shit." He mumbled, then glared. "Well, do something. Get ready for bed." He turned away. "How do I get into these things."

Avram slowly got to his feet and busied himself preparing for bed, but his eyes continued to seek out his friend who had added the cravat and frilled silk shirt to his growing pile of clothing. About his waist was a wide, leather band riding just above his belt line.

"What is that?"

Lillard unbuckled the strange apparel, folded it carefully, and shoved it into the saddlebags that rested against the legs of his bunk. "Moneybelt." He grunted in reply. "You keep your valuables on ya when you're around these camps.Anything left loose is free for the takin'."

"I've never seen you wear one before."

"Well, now you have." Tommy snapped, closing the subject.

Avram did not pursue it.

"About tomorrow," Tommy voiced, stifling a yawn. "I'd like to be on the trail by mid-morning." He stepped out of his trousers and folded them. He bundled the complete wardrobe together and stuffed them into the opposite pocket of the saddlebags. He stood before the bunk in boots and long-johns.

Avram, dressed in like atire, stretched out on the hard cot and pulled the coarse, woolen blanket to waist height. "That's fine."

Lillard, his longhandles open to the waist, wrestled the high-topped boots from his feet then reached up and blew out the light. "Good. Be glad to get shut of this place."

The darkness closed in around them.

His fingers laced behind his head, Avram stared into the darkness of the sloping tent-roof, his mind a termoil of conflicting thoughts. He had finished his first circuit ride of the gold camps, beginning, for the first time, to grasp alittle in-sight into the raw, new country he had chosen for his home, with her melting pot of humanity who created more questions then he could answer. But of them all, the hard-est people for him to understand were still those who called themselves Westerners; men with a strong, quiet vitality that could erupt, at little provocation, over things that seemed impossibly juvenile to the Polish Rabbi.

He sighed.

Greed. Jealousy. Prejudice. These were all emotions that knew no boundries...no nationalities...emotions he could understand. He had seen men fight for them in the name of justice...even for love, but only in the American West had he found men who would kill for them. He shook his head in weary unhappiness.

America: land of freedom, a beautiful, wide-open country where her peoples could come and go at will, plan their own lives, become whatever they wished. And, as in every country, there were the good..the bad..and, he reminded himself, the Westerner. Somehow, that one breed of American seemed able to walk the fine line between the good and the bad. Tommy Lillard was a Westerner who, Avram now suspected, might have tipped a bit on that line.

He shifted onto his side and studied the silent figure on the cot across from him. The handsome features of the Texan were peaceful in slumber, his dreams obviously unencumbered by nightmares. "Ah, Tommy," he whispered softly, "what have you done now?"

IV

Avram carefully removed the Tfillin and Tsalis, wrapping them reverently together and packed them deep into the carpet bag. Sighing, he glanced about the dusty yard is gaze moving to the distant mountains shrouded in the early haze of the warm California morning. He drew deeply on the fresh, spring scented air, the peaceful aura undisturbed by the ugliness of the tent town behind him. Settling his skull cap into place, he picked up the carpet bag and walked to the pole corral and reclaimed his wide-brimmed hat from the post. A gentle smile pulled at his bearded features, his soul at peace from his morning prayers.

"Church over, you can help me with the horses."

Avram hurried to take the lead rope of the familiar chestnut from the Texan. "But Tommy, this is your horse."

"Yeah, and I know I can trust you on him. I'm gonna walk over to the livery and get my other horse. Sure in hell ain't puttin' you on no strange horse. Rosalee'd never forgive me if I got you thrown-off the side of one of these California mountains."

"You bought another horse?" Avram inquired in surprise. "I thought horses were impossible to find in these camps..."

"Nothin's impossible." Lillard mumbled under his breath. "My gear's over by the corral. If I'm not back in a few minutes, go ahead and saddle up." A teasing light flickered momentarily in the Texan's eyes. "And don't forget to check the cinch."

Avram smiled broadly, remembering another time...another place. The smile faded as he watched the lean, figure of his friend in the loose fitting range togs walk away. Tommy Lillard had been a stranger to him then, a man met on the trail. On their journey westward, he had become a friend.

Picking up the well-worn brush, Avram swept the dust from the chestnut's hide with swift strong strokes, bringing out the luster of the animal's coat. The gelding turned its head toward the Rabbi, its long lashed eyelids partially closed as it grunted contentedly under the pleasure of the grooming.

Picking up the saddle blankets, he smoothed them into place, checking them carefully for wrinkles before turning for the saddle, which he swung easily to the horse's back, rocking it gently until it settled over the sloping withers. Reaching under the gelding's belly for the latigo strap, Avram drew it through the girth ring and cinched it tight, tying it off as Tommy had shown him.

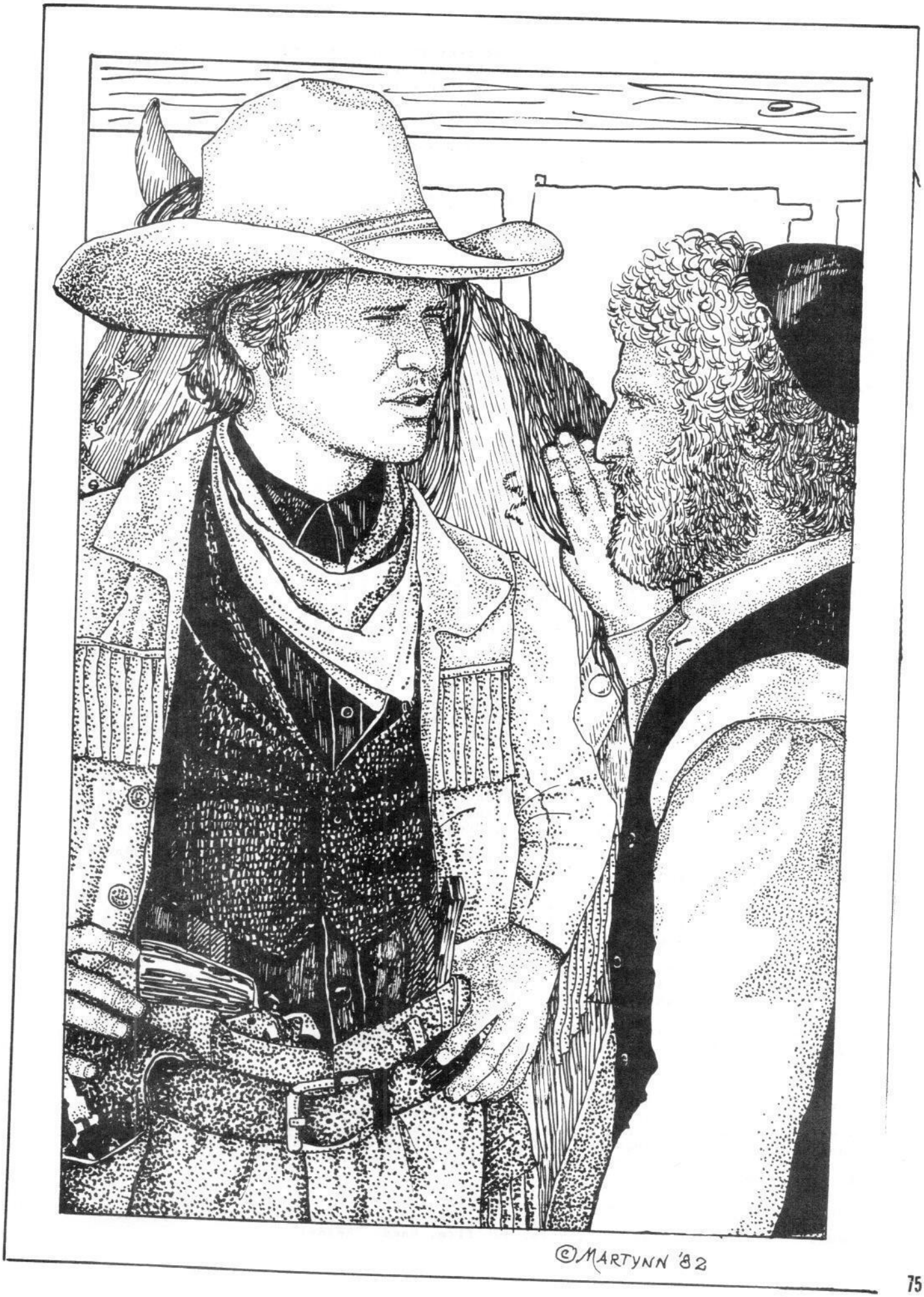
Approaching the chestnut's head from the near side, bridle in hand, the Rabbi offered the bit to the gelding. The animal took the bit, mouthing the cool steel while Avram finished settling the headstall over its ears and buckling the throatlatch beneath its jowls.

The horse saddled to his satisfaction, he lifted the carpet bag and tied it securly in place behind the cantle of the saddle. Stepping back, he observed his finished handiwork and nodded in pride.

He smiled, anticipating the ride back to San Francisco. They were in California now, he told himself. It was spring; the days warm, sunny, beautiful. There would be no mad posse chasing them, no hostile Indians who wished to barbecue them in the attempt to appease some unknown gods. The Indians of California, for the most part, were friendly, unassuming people who had learned to avoid the white men who crowded their mountains and valleys in search of the yellow metal they craved. Yes, he was sure their trip would be both refreshing and peaceful. And, perhaps, he would be able to find out what was troubling his friend.

"'Bout ready, Cuz?"

Avram started guiltily. Turning at the sound of hooves, he stepped quickly aside as Tommy Lillard drew rein on a handsome bay and dismounted.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Ground tying the gelding, the Texan looked over the Rabbi's handiwork. His wide-brimmed stetson pushed back, he pulled at the chestnut's cinch, checking its tightness by inserting two fingers between the leather strap and the animal's belly. "Good job, Cuz. Give 'em another few minutes and you'll be able to tighten it another notch or two. He likes to hold his air a little longer than most."

Tommy turned back to his friend, smiling as the Rabbi reached out a hand to the new mount. "Nice lookin' horse, huh?"

Avram ran a gentle hand over the dark, glistening neck of the big, blood-bay, lifting the heavy, black mane then letting it fall back into place. "Yes." He said. "He's a very nice horse."

The gelding lowered its head to the touch, sniffing Avram's fingers then snorted softly.

"What kind of a funny saddle is that?"

The crooked grin pulled at Lillard's mouth as he joined the Rabbi at the bay's side. "It's Mex, Pard. See the wider, flatter horn, the single rig where mine's double..."

"What are these strange coverings over the stirrups?"

"Those 're called tapaderas. 'Bout ever'thing that grows in mañana land has thornes or needles. A man used alot of leather protectin' himself and his horse."

"What is this mañana land? A gold camp?"

Tommy chuckled at Avram's puzzlement. "Sorry, Cuz. Nah, Mañana land's Mexico. I guess she's called that 'cause her people ain't much for trouble; easy, carefree people who like to put things off, why do today what can be put off 'til tomorrow. Savvy?"

"And, this Mexico has chowboys, like America?"

"Sure they do. Where there's cows there's cowboys, only down there they're called vaqueros. Hell of a good bunch of horsemen, too. Comin' from west Texas, I used to see alot of these rigs. From the silver conchos, and the inlay, I'd guess this one came up from Sonora. She's a beautiful bit of saddlery." Tommy commented admiringly.

"What's this?"

Tommy stepped closer as Avram parted the hair over the animal's near shoulder revealing a strange marking burned into the hide, hidden by hair still long from winter. He reached out and carefully outlined the marking with a curious finger. "I missed that."

"What is it?" Avram repeated.

"A brand of some kind. Ain't never seen one like it. It's not Texas...not any of the big outfits anyway. And sure ain't Mex. They're big. Never small and hidden like this." He retraced the serpentine-like marking. "Could be Injun."

A teasing light flickered in Avram's blue eyes. "You bought this horse from an Indian Mexican chowboy, yes?"

"No," a hardness touched Lillard's voice and he turned away from his friend, fingering the ornate headstall of the silver inlaid bridle. "Come on, we're wasting time. Did you get everything of yours loaded?"

"Yes. It is all loaded." Avram assured him. He fingered a silver concho on the Mexican saddle thoughtfully. "It must have been very hard for a man to part with such a horse as this...and such a grand saddle."

"Will you get over here." Tommy snapped. "Let's decide how we're gonna divide up our supplies." He glanced over at the loaded chestnut. "Guess that's no problem...I carry it."

Avram crossed to the chestnut's side, and took up the slack that had mysteriously developed in the cinch. He untied the horse while Tommy opened his bulging saddlebags, checked the contents briefly, then strapped them across the flatter ones which matched the Mexican saddle. "We'll empty everything out and do some repacking before we break camp in the morning, maybe some of that stuff of yours will fit into these extra bags."

The bags secured behind the cantle, the Texan stepped easily into the saddle and gathered the reins. The bay arched its neck and mouthed the bit expectantly, but remained quiet under Tommy's gentle, but firm, hand. "Ready?"

"Yes." Avram Belinsky took a moment to adjust the stirrups to his shorter legs, then stepped aboard the patient chestnut, reining the horse next to the bay.

"I know a short cut that'll take us to the coast in two days. We'll have you home before you know it."

Avram glanced at his friend, worry shading the excitment of the trip. For a moment, he was very homesick. "Yes, it will be good to get home."

V.

"Look."

Avram pulled his horse up and followed Tommy's pointing finger. A white-tailed doe with a young fawn disappeared into the undergrowth ahead of them on the narrow trail.

"It's spring," Tommy explained softly, "keep watchin'."

A moment later, a five-pronged buck stepped majestically from the brush, stopped and gazed at them unafraid.

Tommy reached for his saddle gun, pulled it halfway out of the scabbard then released it and let it fall back into place. "Guess we don't need fresh meat yet..."

Avram nodded in agreement with Tommy's reluctance to shoot the magnificant animal.

The buck turned and disappeared into the underbrush after the doe.

Tommy reined the bay into the narrow trail and they continued steadily upward, the setting sun hot on their backs. "Got to keep moving, it's gonna be dark soon." He sat back in the saddle as the bay lowered its head and carefully picked its way down a rough spur, gathering its powerful hindquarters under it and leaping past the washout that obscured the trail. He grinned as he watched the chestnut clear the broken trail and stop beside him, Avram clingling hap-hazardly to the saddle. "Squeeze that horn any harder, Cuz, and you'll squeeze it right off."

"What kind of a trail is this?"

"The only one at the moment," Tommy grumbled. He moved the trail-wise bay past the chestnut. "We ain't been on the right one since that slide we passed at mid-day."

Avram looked swiftly about them, his attention finally focusing on the setting sun. "You mean...Tommy, we're going in the wrong direction!"

"Then you ought to feel right at home."

"Are we lost?" For the first time concern touched the blue eyes of the Polish Rabbi.

"No, we ain't lost." The Texan snapped in wounded indignation. "I'm a Texan; Texans can't get lost." He kicked the bay into a stumbling trot, studing the narrow trail closely. "I don't think." He mumbled under his breath.

Already he suspected his "short-cut" had taken them half a day out of their way.

"What?"

"Nothing'. Just keep up, we'll be stopping soon and I don't want to have to look for ya."

As they climbed the narrow, twisting trail, Lillard became more and more uneasy. He had no desire to spend a dark, moonless night perched on the edge of the mountain. Already, the horses were weary from the hard climb and rolled their bits with a growing thirst. The pines that grew on all sides of them gave testimony to water,but where? In the narrow, deep canyons the mountain stream could be a stone's throw from them and never be seen.

The bay stopped.

Tommy, slung forward against the wide pommel, swore softly at being caught off guard. The desert bred hourse side stepped, pulling at the tight rein. Giving in to instinct more than common sense, Lillard released the rein, giving the gelding its head.

The bay quickened its pace until it stopped at a fresh slide that blocked further travel. It would have stopped the Texan; it didn't the bay. Before Tommy could sense the animal's intention, the bay pulled its haunches tightly under it and stepped into the rubble of the slide.

"Where? Shee-it!" Unable to do more once the horse had stepped into the rubble, Tommy grabbed the thick mane as they started sliding. He made no move to tighten the bay's rein, fearful of upsetting the animal's precarious balance in the loose shale. One misstep and the animal would roll. "Keep your horse's head up! Make him slide!" He shouted to the rear without taking his eyes from their decent. "Don't let him get his head down..."

It was the only warning he had time to shout as he struggled to stay aboard the sure-footed gelding. Their sliding momentum quickened. They started a mini-slide in their wake, the bay sliding then cat-leaping over debris of past slides, sliding again until he leaped one final time--into the broad, cleared expanse of the stageroad.

Tommy swore loudly, quickly reining the bay aside out of the path of the chestnut close behind. "Damned stage road."

Both horses stood on trembling limbs, their necks lathered, their breaths whizzing through fully-extended nostrils, their riders in much the same condition.

"Well, Cuz, is this more your idea of a trail?"

"You mean it was down here...all the time?!" Avram looked up at the slide, and the narrow trail they had followed most of the day.

"We're off that damned mountain, ain't we?" Tommy snapped in weary irritation. "Come on. It's gonna be dark soon, let's find a place off the road and make camp."

The Texan again relinquished rein to the bay but watched the animal's progress closely. The gelding had brought them down for a reason and he was pretty sure he knew what it was.

They crossed the wide stage road and moved into the heavy underbrush, breaking cover on another narrow, trail, but in the growing darkness they could hear the gurling of a fast running stream. A moment later the bay pushed eargerly past the tangled undergrowth and with the chestnut at his heel waded into the stream up to their knees. The horses buried their muzzles deep into the cold, fast moving water, taking long noisy sips.

After the second drink, the bay lifted its head and moved out of the stream. The chestnut lowered its head for another drink.

"Pull him up, Avram, he's had enough. After he's cooled out we'll offer him more."

Tommy gratefully slid from the saddle and stripped the heavy gear from the bay. He tipped the saddle up onto the pommel and draped the wet saddle blanket, wet side up, over it to dry in the cool evening. He fumbled in his saddlebags until he found two sets of rope hobbles. He put one set on the bay and tossed the other to Avram who quickly followed his example with the chestnut.

Pulling the bridle over the bay's head, Lillard grabbed a double handful of bunch grass, twisted it into a tight clump and sat about rubbing down the seaty gelding. "I'll rub down the chestnut," he offered, "just up stream I saw a meadow. Go pull some of those wild oats and bunch grass for the horses. I want to keep them close to camp while we're this close to the stage road. After dinner, I'll ration out some of the grain I brought for them. Don't want 'em to have it until they're cooled out."

Lillard stepped away from the bay, moved to the side of the jadded chestnut and quickly rubbed it down.

He had led the horses back to water and re-hobbled them by the time Avram returned, his arms filled with the freshly cut fodder. He dropped it between the horses then moved to help the Texan set up camp. It was dark before they finished and sat down before a carefully banked fire and a cup of coffee while freshly hooked trout baked on the spit over the hot flames.

In the gentle companionship of their closeness, they talked about the months they had spent apart, easy in a relationship grown from long hours together.

"So," Tommy concluded, wipping greasy fingers on his neckerchief and shirt front, before reaching for his second trout, "you had a good trip. Can't say I wasn't a mite worried about ya. Guess the worst of mankind are in the gold fields now." He stared out across the fire, his eyes tempered with a far away light. "It's like these hills and streams are runnin' with gold."

"So much gold," Avram shook his head sadly. "So much unhappiness, greed...death."

"It's human nature, Cuz," Tommy remarked easily. "What one man has, there'll always be others who'll want to take it from him."

"Yes." Avram mumbled, staring into the flames.

They fell silent.

To the soft trill of mountain quail, the gurgling of the fast moving stream and the soft sounds of the night, the two men grew drowsy.

"How long had you been waiting?" Avram asked.

"I rode in last Friday...long about dusk." The Texan reached over and refilled his cup then settled back against the saddle, his back padded by the heavy horse blanket. "Made better time than I thought I would. Spring thaws were early this year, alot of the passes are already open."

"No Indians?" Avram asked. He carefully picked the tender flesh from the small bones of the fish.

"Rumors mostly." Lillard stretched long legs to the fire as the evening chill moved in "Alot of the army posts here in California and some of the ajoinin' territories are losin' men to the gold fields...men desertin'. Short staffed, they can't deal with the Indian flar-ups. Seems where the soldiers ain't...the Injuns are. There's an ol' chief called Mangus Coloradas down south really givin' the Blue Coats a run for their money...good place to stay clear of."

Avram stiffled a yawn. "How far did we come today?"

Tommy shifted uncomfortably. "We got a late start," he argued. "We were makin' good time 'til that slide closed our trail. 'Sides I don't remember anything being said 'bout us bein' in any hurry." He defended hotly.

"No," Avram sighed. "I'm in no hurry." He closed his eyes in lazy comfort. "I'm glad you decided to ride back."

"Yeah, me, too." Lillard sighed contently, then smiled as a thought occured to him. "Ain't real sure you could call it <u>all</u> my decision," remembering all too well his difficulties with the lawman of Angel's Camp.

A muffled sound from the direction of the stream, and Tommy stiffened, then slowly sat up. He reached for the belt gun, and backed out of the night-blinding light of the fire.
There it was again.

Moving off the trail in their direction, he heard a shoed hoof strike stone. A horse was watering at the stream.

He glanced at their fire. It was small, banked properly and giving off over little smoke, but anyone with trail savvy would find them.

Avram opened his eyes, setting up when he found Tommy's place empty. "Tommy?"

Lillard motioned his to silence.

The horse moved out of the stream, paused, then started through the brush toward them. Behind Lillard, the chestnut nickered soft greeting. The bay remained silent.

"Damn nag of mine could take some lessons from the bay," Tommy tightened his grip about the butt of his belted revolver and waited.

"Hello the camp."

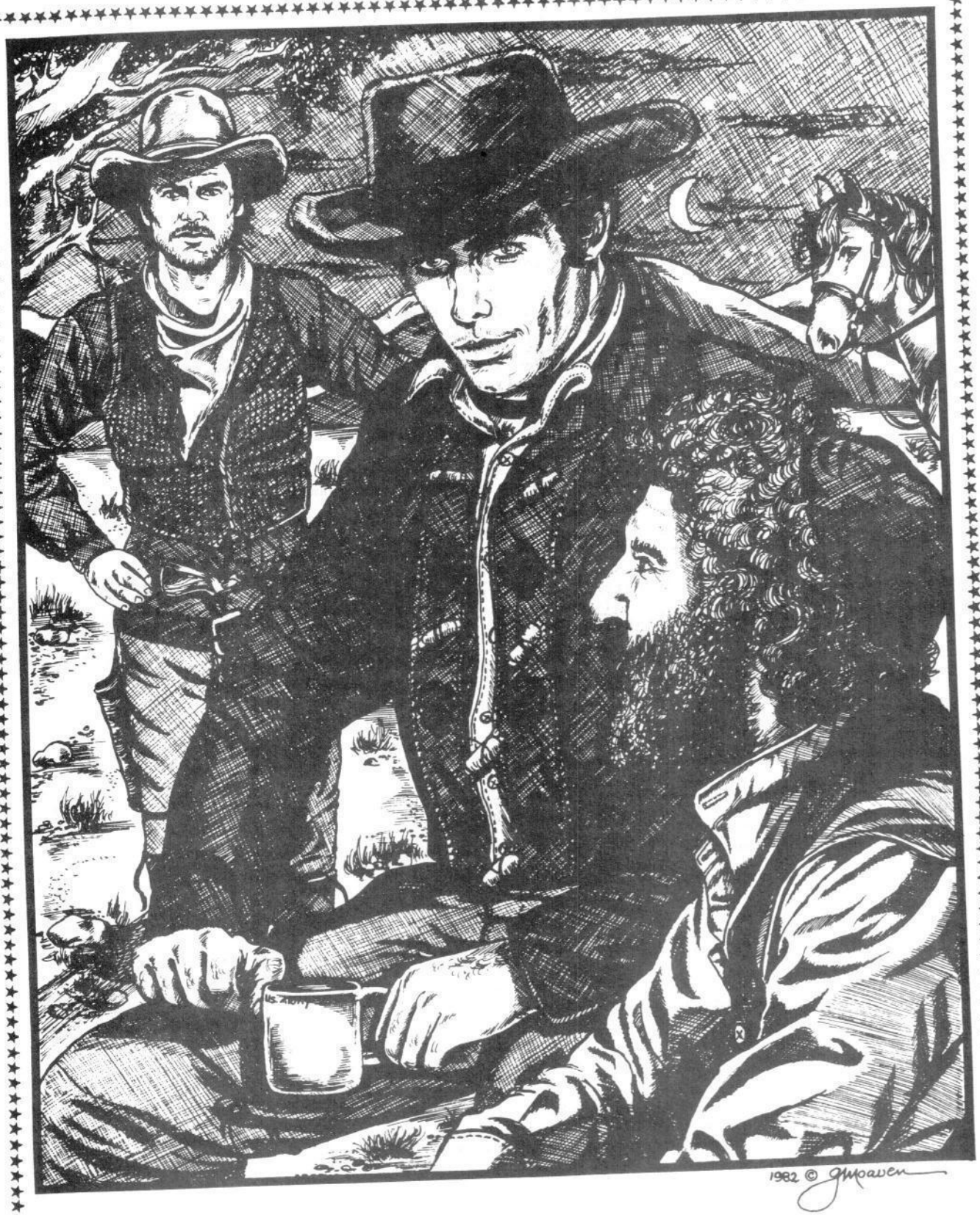
Lillard stepped to the edge of the firelight. "Ride in slow, Stranger."

A powerfully built, short-coupled sorrel broke cover, its flax mane reflecting the firelight as it moved to the edge of the camp opposite tommy and stopped. Its rider, no more than a shadow in the flickering light, sat easy. "I've ridden a far piece, like to share your fire if I'm welcome."

"Light and rest." Tommy invited. He stepped forward to meet the man with the deep commanding voice.

There was a squeak of saddle leather as the stranger dismounted. Ground-typing the sorrel, he moved into the light of the fire. His hands were free of weapons. Tommy pushed his revolver back into the waist band of his trousers. "There's fresh coffee on the fire, help yourself. We've just eaten, but there's an extra trout there if you want it."

"Much obliged."



'I'M CALLED CORD.'

The tall stranger turned and opened his saddlebags, returning to the fire with his own cup. He stooped and poured the hot coffee...left handed. The action did not go unnoticed by the watchful Texan, nor the fact that the stranger wore a holstered gun on his right hip...tied down.

"I'll share a bit of your coffee then see to my horse." He touched the cup to his lips and took a cautious sip. The fingers of his right hand brushed against the butt of the holstered .44.

Tommy moved to Avram's side and refilled his own cup, making each move slow, deliberate. The stranger was adhering to trail etiquette, Tommy tried to relax.

"Our horses are hobbled behind us and there's plenty of fresh cut bunch grass, if you care to stake your sorrel with 'em."

"Thanks," the tall stranger took another sip. A gentle breeze flared up, blowing the small fire to life.

The sorrel threw up its head and nickered softly, its belly shaking gently.

"Streak," the stranger spoke softly. The sorrel quieted, but its head remained high.

"Must have gotten the scent of our horses," Tommy commented unnecessarily, the stranger making him more uneasy than he cared to admit. He wanted the man out of camp, but trail courtesy forbad turning him away without cause. Tonight, he cautioned himself, he would sleep with one eye open.

"It's a beautiful night," Avram remarked easily, already accepting what he did not pretend to understand, his natural curiousity focused on the tall stranger. "I am Avram Belinsky and this is my good friend, Tommy Lillard."

An amused light flickered in the gray-green eyes, as the stranger tipped his cup in acknowledgement of Avram's introductions. "I'm called Cord."

"That is all? Cord? What a strange name." Avram glanced toward the Texan who remained strangely quiet. "I like it." Avram declared pleasantly, "It suits you. You are from California?"

"Avram," Tommy protested. "some folks don't take kindly to too many questions." He searched the unreadable expression on the stranger's dark features.

"I'm just passin' through, looking for a.." Cord paused, and something within the strange eyes hardened, "a friend."

Tommy felt his stomach lerch. There was something he couldn't identify in the man's voice that seemed cold...deadly. He remained tense with a growing uneasiness.

"In the camps?" Avram slowly shook his head, his infectious smile easy on his gentle features."It will not be easy, looking for one man in the camps. There are so many men..." he chuckled, "so many camps."

"Yes," Cord agreed, "but I'll find him."

Tommy felt a prickle of warning at the base of his neck and rubbed it with a thoughtful hand. It was a sign he never ignored; a sign of trouble. The man was on a blood trail, he could sense it. Not so much in what the man had said, but in the way he had said it. He was a loner ; the .44 tied to his thigh alienating him from normal relations with others of his kind. He would have few 'friends'.

"You headed for Angel's Camp?"

The soft spoken question pulled Tommy's attention away from the holstered weapon, to the man's strangely penetrating eyes. "No," he set his cup down and reached slowly to the pocket of his shirt for his makings," comin' from there. Our trail was closed by a slide, forced us back to the road just short of dusk. We're headed for Frisco."

"You haven't been following the stage road?"

"No, trouble tends to follow the roads."

The stranger nodded in agreement. He finished his coffee and threw the dregs into the fire. "Then you probably haven't crossed trails with anyone today."

Tommy frowned, reading the interest that was masked so expertly in the deep voice. "No...like I said, we've been off the main trails. We've seen no one."

"And who would willingly ride the trails we ride," Avram asked, "who would want to ride off the side of a mountain? Only my friend...the trail blazer."

Tommy grinned sheepishly at Cord's inquiring gaze. "Game trails ain't much to Avram's likin'."

The tall man got to his feet. "I'm much obliged for the coffee. If you have no objections, I'll take you up on the invite and spread my blankets 'til mornin'."

"You're welcome," Tommy answered. He watched the man untie his bedroll and toss it to the ground. The heavy saddle followed. "Avram, why don't you hobble his sorrel with our horses while he spread s his gear."

The Rabbi got to his feet, taking the sorrel's reins and moved into the darkness behind their fire. Tommy took a deep breath, glad for the excuse to keep the man called Cord in sight. He drew on his smoke as the tall stranger spread his blankets at the very edge of the fire on the opposite side from them.

Cord. The name had a familiar ring to it that gnawed at his memory. The man, he guessed was in his mid-to-late thirties who wore his aura of deadliness with the cautious ease of long years with his back to a wall. A man you didn't have to ask how fast he was with a gun; you accepted the probability that he was good...very good, and made every effort to stay clear of him.

A noise behind him and Tommy motioned Avram to him. "Get the horse settled okay?"

"Oh, sure," Avram commented easily, grinning at Tommy then at the stranger across the fire. "Already your horse and his have become good friends. I staked them together."

"Wonderful," Lillard mumbled.

"With Streak settled, I'll be turnin'in." The deep voice carried easily across the camp. "Good night."

"G'd night," Tommy mumbled then stopped Avram with an urgent hand to his arm. "Listen, Pard," he lowered his voice. "Don't go walkin' in your sleep tonight. You get into your blankets and <u>stay</u> there."

"Why?" Avram followed Tommy's gaze across the fire, his eyes widening with apprehension, "Our guest?"

"Our 'guest', as you call him, ain't no wanderin' cowboy, I can tell you that," Tommy hissed sarcastically.

What do you mean?" Avram frowned.

"He's trouble, Cuz, real trouble."

"But he seems..." Avram struggled for the words to express his feelings as Tommy motioned urgently for him to keep his voice down. "Nice..." he finished lamely.

"I'll have that carved on your tombstone," Tommy grumbled. "Here lies a dumb-assed Jew who got himself ventilated by a 'nice' gunslinger."

"Gunslinger? Gunslinger..." Avram mouthed the word, "why would he throw his gun at me?"

Tommy groaned. "Sometimes, Pard, you can be damned irritatin'. He ain't gonna throw- why do I try to..." he mumbled as he fought to put their danger into words, "he slings lead, Pard, not guns!"

Avram wisely refrained from voicing his next question, reading unease in his friend's handsome features. "Oh," he commented softly then sighed, "Tommy, I think he is a good man..."

"You can have <u>that</u> put on my tombstone, if I happen to make a wrong move around him," Tommy swore under his breath.

"But Tommy..."

"Just get in your blankets. I'm sorry I brought up the whole thing. Forget it. We've got to get an early start in the morning, if we're gonna find that trail I lost this afternoon."

"Lost? We were <u>lost</u>?!"

"Get to bed!"

Avram rolled into his blankets, leaving a frustrated, worried friend seated by the fire. In moments, the weariness of long hours in the saddle washed over him and he slept.

VI

There was a bite to the early morning air when Tommy stretched and opened sleep-heavy eyes. He drew in the brisk headiness of pine scent and luxuated in the awakening day. It had been a long sleepless night while he lay awake thinking of the stranger who shared their camp. He turned to glance across the dead fire to the empty bedroll. Swearing under his breath, Lillard threw his blankets aside and stumbled to his feet, reaching for his boots.

A figure moved into the clearing and dropped an arm full of firewood before the flame-blackened pit. Seeing the Texan, Avram Belinsky smiled warmly. "Tommy. Good morning."

"Cuz. Where's...?"

"Cord?" Avram antisipated his question. "He's pulling hay for the horses."

Tommy eased back down and roughly pulled on his pants, fighting the difficult task over the already doned footware. "He moved damn quiet for a big man." Standing up he belted his pants and reached for his gunbelt, settled it into place and buckled it. His belt-gun he retrieved from his blankets and pushed it into his waistband.

"You slept late," Avram commented. "He was up when I finished morning prayers."

"You mean I slept through church?" Tommy glanced in amazement at the black-frocked Rabbi.

"You must have been tired."

"Yeah," Tommy squatted down at the firepit and banked it to his liking. "I'll finish this. Why don't you get some water and we'll put on the coffee."

"Already have it." Avram slid an old dented pot toward the Texan who accepted it with a sigh.

"Seems everyone's two steps ahead of me this morning. How 'bout getting' the coffee out of my saddlebags?"

"Sure." Avram moved to Lillard's blankets, pushed them away from the heavy Mexican saddle and pulled the matching bags out where he could reach the rawhide fastenings. Opening them, he reached in and pushed aside several items of clothing before settling on a white canvas bag which he pulled forth.

The bag caught, then slipped from his hand, spilling a flood of greenbacks over the Texan's blankets. The bag lay untouched as the Rabbi stared in stunned silence at the fortune before him.

"What are you...?" Tommy took a faultering step toward the Rabbi and his discovered wealth. "She--it, Rabbi...where...?" His eyes focused past the money to the bold,black print on the canvas bag. U.S. ARMY.

Avram Belinsky came to his feet, his face distorted with hurt and anger. He whirled to face the Texan. "You...meshagoona..."

"What?!"

Without warning, the bearded Rabbi lashed out with flailing fists, one catching the surprised Texan in the face before he could raise a hand in defense of the continued blows. He stepped backwards, stumbled and fell.

Tommy Lillard came to his feet mad, his hazel eyes flashing with wounded indignation, the money at his feet, momentarily forgotten. "Why in hell did ya do that for?"

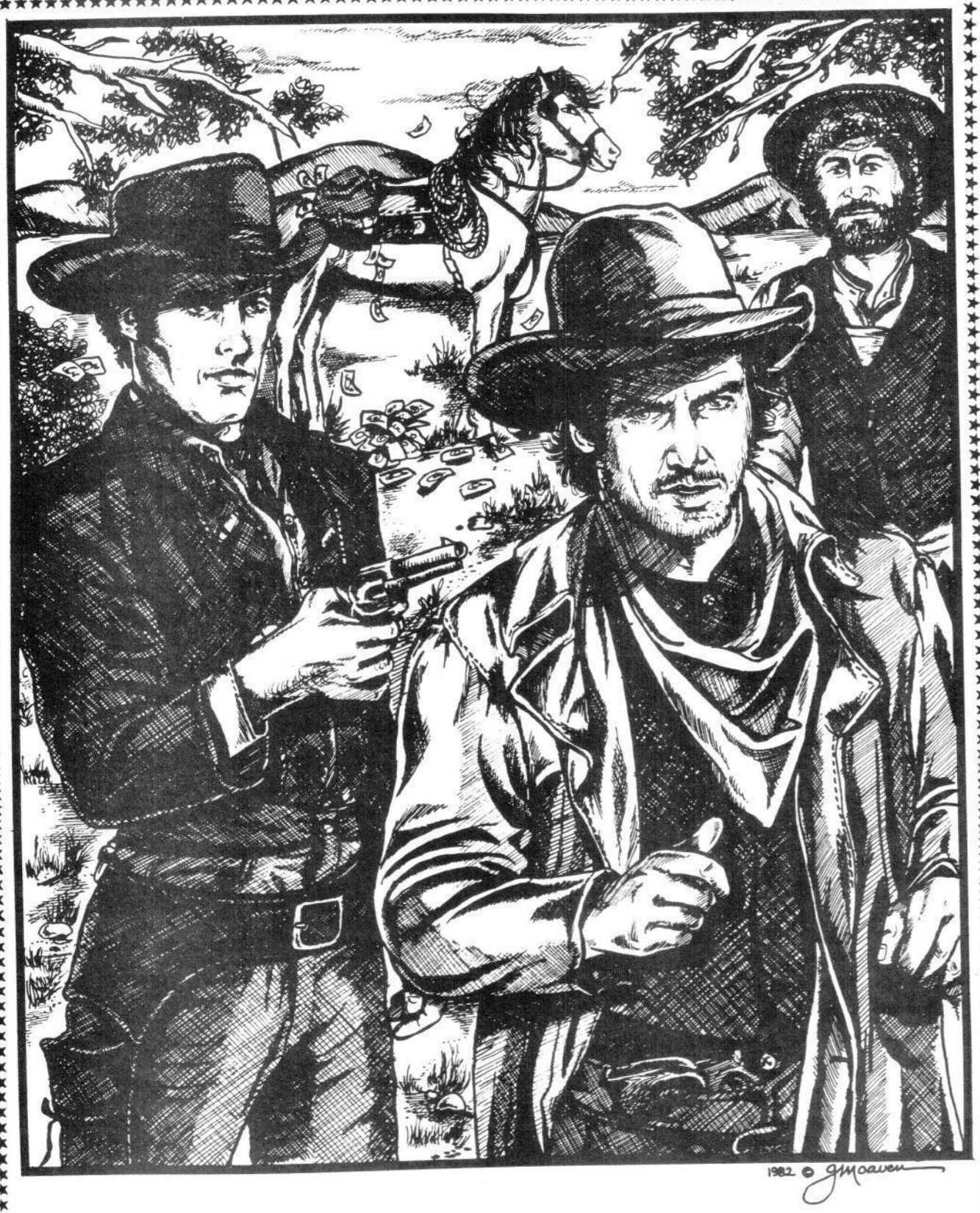
"You can say that? To me? After what you have done?" The Rabbi raved, his arms thrown wide to indicate the camp and the wealth of currency inwhich they stood.

"Yeah!" The cowboy moved forward, his hand unconsciously smearing the blood that trickled from his nose. "You damned right I can! Done? Done what?!"

"I thought...I really thought you were finished with..." There was moisture behind Avram's eyes as he fumbled to express his feelings. His fists tightened. "You can call yourself my friend...what about last time? You know I would...and you..."

"Back off, Cuz," Lillard's hazel eyes flashed with hot-tempered fury. "I ain't letting you deck me again...not without some goddamn good explainin'!"

"Explaining?" Avram moaned, "<u>This</u>," he motioned to the money, "needs explaining?" He took another step toward Lillard.



'DROP THE GUN FRIEND.'

The early morning light drifted through the trees and reflected off the barrel of the Colt revolver that had suddenly materialized in the fist of the tall cowboy.

"Guns? With you always...guns!"

"The last time you hit me, Rabbi, it was because I'd robbed a bank..."

"And this," Avram jestured to the greenbacks, "you got by honest labor?"

Tommy groaned. "Somehow I don't think you're gonna believe the truth, Pard."

"Have you ever lied to me?"

"No." Tommy whispered watching his friend closely. The Colt wavered then the muzzle droppped.

"Then tell me." Avram demanded. "Where did such wealth come from?"

"It's not that easy," Tommy hedged, then reading the disappointment in Avram's eyes, he swore aloud,"goddamn it, Rabbi, I don't know!" His eyes hardened when a look of disbelief crossed his friend's face. "That's the truth, god damn it! I don't know!"

"Drop the gun, Friend. And turn around. Real slow."

Tommy stiffened at the deep-voiced command behind him. Never could he remember having heard such cold anger as he detected in a voice. He was certain that he was very close to death. Slowly, he released the hammer of the Colt and allowed the gun to drop from his fingers. He turned to face the man called Cord, raising his hands--open-palms outward, to shoulder heighth away from the gun that was still in his holster. He wanted no misunderstandings.

He faced the tall gunman. The .44 leveled at belt height, unwavering, the hammer thumbed back to full cock. He wet dry lips. It would have a hair trigger, and from the fury he read in the gray-green eyes, it would take little to fire it. "Okay.. take it easy..."

"I'm gonna holster my gun," the deep, cold voice declared.

Tommy let out a slow breath and nodded. "I ain't movin'." He reassured the man.

The pressure on the hammer was released, and the .44 disappeared into the holster at the man's hip, but he made no move to relax the wide-legged stance he had taken.

"You can lower your arms..slow."

"Tommy, what...?"

"Stay out of this, Avram." Tommy hissed. "You want the money? Take it."

"I will," Cord assured him. "And the horse you stole."

"Now, hold on," Tommy snapped. "I ain't stole..." He stopped, reading the deadly light that had flashed in the man's eyes. Caution warned him against angering the man further. He swallowed hard and fought down his own mounting anger. "What do you want?"

"You." Cord answered curtly. "When you're ready...draw."

"Now, hold on," Tommy snapped. "I ain't got no arguement with you."

"You draw." Cord paused, his voice cold with hate. "Or I'll kill you where you stand."

"I don't think so," Tommy's heart pounded against his ribs as he played his only card. "You shoot me down and it's murder. Avram here's a witness."

"I could kill him, too." The strange eyes flashed with eager anticipation.

"Yes," Tommy agreed, "but I don't think you will."

"You're staking alot on that."

"Our lives," Tommy said. "I ain't no fool. I'm a dead man if I go for my gun against you."

"You might get lucky." Cord offered.

"No," Tommy eased his hands away from his waist and the gun holstered there. "If you want me dead that bad, you're gonna have to gun me down."

A silence settled o er the camp, and death rode the soft, gentle breezes. Three men waited.

Tommy lowered his left hand cautiously, keeping his eyes on the gunman and fumbled with the buckle of his gunbelt. It loosened and fell. He stepped away from it.

"You give me no choise." Cord stated harshly. "I'm taking you back...to hang...for murder."

A sharp intake of breath behind him and Tommy swore. "It was a fair fight."

The .44 drifted, fully-cocked, into the fist of the gunslinger with a speed and ease that left the Texan speechless. "Jesus...I'm unarmed...for god's sake!"

"That's the only thing that keeps you alive."

"Tommy?"

"Avram, damn it, stay out of this!" Tommy snapped. "Look," he addressed the gunman, "you've got no argument with the Rabbi. He ain't no part of this. Let him go."

The dark, brooding gaze shifted slowly from the Texan to the black-frocked Rabbi. "Saddle up and ride out."

Avram looked from the stranger to his friend. "What has he done?"

"He killed a man when he stole that money and the horse. I'm taking him back to hang for it."

"Tommy?"

"I didn't know about the money," Tommy defended.

"And the man?" Avram whispered. "He says you killed a man..."

Tommy took a deep breath and slowly let it out, momentarily his eyes dropped before the gentle inquiring gaze of his friend.

"Then...he is right?"

Lillard swore at the hurt he read in Avram's eyes. "If I get a chance, Cuz, I'll explain."

"Enough." Cord interrupted. "Rabbi, saddle your horse and ride out. Now!"

Avram ignored the command. He studied the unreadable features of his friend.

"Will you get the hell out of here before he changes his mind! You've got a family to worry about, remember?"

"No," Avram declared firmly. "I'm staying with you. Rosalie would understand."

"Avram, don't go noble on me! Goddamn it get out of here!" Tommy read the determination in his friend's gentle blue eyes, "I'll be all right. I ain't done nothing that can't be straightened out."

"Then I will go with you." Avram stated firmly.

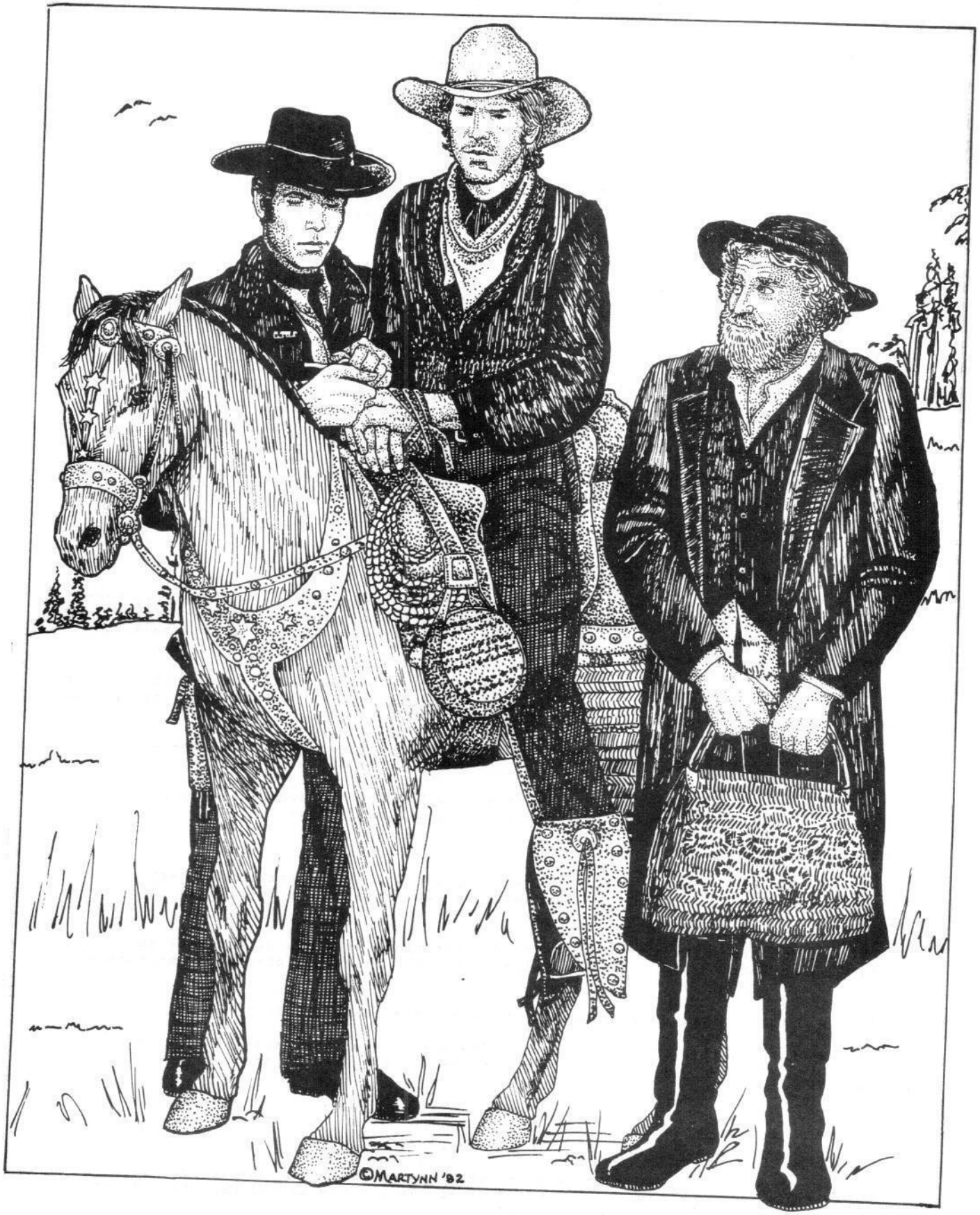
"Cord, get him out of here." Tommy pleaded.

A smile pulled at the edges of the gunman's mouth but there was no humor reflected in his eyes. "A man does what he has to do, Lillard." His jawline hardened. "And he's got to stand by his friends. But if he moves a hand near a gun, he's a dead man."

Avram moved up next to Tommy. "I have no gun."

"Then we understand each other," Cord remarked simply. "Belinsky, pick up the money, and put it back into the bags. We've got alot of ground to cover and it's gettin' late."

"How 'bout breakfast," Tommy snapped, "ain't a condemned man intitled to a last meal?"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"While the Rabbi rolls the blankets you can heat the coffee and warm up some beans and hardtack, but make it quick."

Sometime later, while he ate a quick breakfast, Tommy worried over his problems. He had killed a man. He had taken the dead man's horse and gear and, inadvertantly, the money which had been concealed deep within the heavy Mexican bags. He had had words with the law of Angel's Camp which had led to the threat of hanging; a threat he had taken as something to assure his leaving town. It had worked. He had left. So why had Toleman changed his mind?"

Tommy's brow wrinkled in honest puzzlement. It had to be the money. Somehow, Toleman had found out about the fortune in U.S. currency and sent Cord after him.

Cord, a professional gunman. Why had Toleman sent such a man? He had deputies. Was Cord after a reward that Toleman might have put on his head? Tommy rejected that thought. The anger, the hatred he read in the tall gunman's eyes were not that of a hired gun, more like a personal fight, a grudge. Revenge? Cord had shown no interest in the wealth only with pushing him into a gunfight.

A sudden thought pulled Lillard's attention again to the gunman across the camp from him. Of course, he reasoned, Cord, himself, had given him the answer. He had to have been a friend to the man he'd killed. He was after revenge. When he, Tommy, had refused to go for his gun he had forced Cord to take him in...alive...in the hopes of hanging a murder charge on him.

Well, Tommy reassured himself, it wouldn't work. There had been witnesses. He had been forced to kill the man...or be killed. No, he wouldn't hang...couldn't hang. It had been a fair fight. However, the money in the saddlebags would definately take some explaining. With a heavy sigh, he knew he did not relish trying to reason with the law of Angel's Camp.

"Lillard, everything's packed, get over here." The deep emotionless voice broke through Tommy's reverie and he moved to the side of the saddled bay. He put a toe to the stirrup and swung easily into the saddle.

"Cross your hands over the horn."

Tommy did as he was directed silently.

The gunman cut a leather thong from the saddle skirt and swiftly, efficiently, bound his wrists. He slide the bay's reins into Tommy's hands. "You'll be able to rein, but remember, if the bay should suddenly take it into its head to run...I'll shoot him first..then you. Comprende?"

Tommy nodded curt understanding. He stiffened with surprise as Cord swung his holstered Colt about his waist and buckled it, allowing the weapon to shift into its customary place on the Texan's hip. "Why?"

A smile tugged at the gunman's mouth but the eyes remained hard. "Sometime along the way, you might change your mind."

A chill coursed Tommy's spine, the hairs on the back of his neck standing rigid at the coldness of the man's words. "The rope...or a shoot-out, right?"

The smile broadened.

"Forget it. I ain't pullin' iron against you, and I ain't stretchin' no hemp either." Tommy swore. "Let's get ridin'. The sooner we get there, the sooner I can clear this up."

Cord swung aboard the sorrel with a grace surprising for a man of his size and reined along side the bay. The two geldings touched noses, whickering is soft greeting.

"Friends," Tommy mumbled, remembering Avram's words from the night before.

"For a long time," Cord remarked coldly. "Belinsky, you ride ahead of us, I want you where I can see you. You try getting behind me," Cord warned, "and you'll die. Comprende?"

"What is this co--pre...?"

"Avram," Tommy snapped, "just do what he says."

"Do this, he says, do that," Avram grumbled as he pulled himself awkwardly into the saddle of the chestnut, seemingly unmindful of the men who waited for him. "He can say this..my friend, who finds money..."

"Avram," Tommy implored helplessly, "shut up."

VII

The Rabbi reined the chestnut out of the clearing and toward the open stage road. They broke cover and the three horses stepped eagerly into the roadway. Avram turned north, only to be brought up short by a shout from behind. He reined the chestnut to a stop.

"This way," Cord directed.

"That way?" Avram glanced from the road back to the gunman who sat the sorrel in obvious amusement.

"This way," he repeated softly.

"This way?" Tommy mouthed in disbelief. He and Avram exchanged glances.

"This way!" A hardness touched Cord's deep voice.

"South?" Lillard's hands tightened on the bay's reins and the animal danced nervously under him. "Angel's Camp is north of here."

"We're not going to Angel's Camp," Cord stated coldly, "now get movin'."

"South? Why in hell should I go south?" Slow realization filtered across the Texan's handsome features. "Where in hell <u>are</u> we goin'?"

The sorrel stood still facing the figgity bay, its rider's left hand steady on the rein, his right lightly brushing the holstered .44 on his thigh. "You ride..or shoot.. friend. Which is it gonna be?"

Tommy wet dry lips but his eyes stayed locked to the gaze of the tall gunman."Where in hell are you takin' me?"

"To hang."

"Where! Damn it!"

"Arizona."

"For what?" Tommy whispered harshly.

"For killin' an Army paymaster, stealing an Army payroll and shooting a civilian and stealin' the bay you're ridin'."

"I didn't do it!" Tommy denied. For the first time, real fear of his situation tightened his guts. "You've got the wrong man!"

"Last night you admitted it," Cord reminded him. "Now ride..or we have it out here... now."

"Good god, Man, listen to me!" Tommy implored.

The gunslinger's eyes hardened. "You can do better than that, Lillard." He rode slowly forward. At the side of the bay he reached to the horn and with a swift tug at Tommy's bindings, they fell away. Cord's hand tightened on the sorrel's rein and the animal backed away from the bay. His right hand hovered over the walnut grip of the holstered .44. "Down me, Lillard, and you're a free man."

Tommy swore as the bay fought the tight rein. He would have little or no chance on the restless horse. The sorrel stood quiet. If he moved toward his gun, he would die.

"Wait!"

The chestnut moved between the sorrel and the bay. "I'm sure we can work this out. I'm not a Rabbi for nothing."

"Avram, stay out of this."

"Cord," Avram addressed the gunman. "You believe Tommy killed a man in this...Arizona!"

"Yes."

"And shot another man who owns the horse he rides?"

"Yes." Cord's voice hardened.

"When did this happen?" Avram persisted.

"Four..almost five weeks ago."

"Tommy, where were you four or five weeks ago?" Avram asked anxiously.

Tommy groaned. "South. I rode up through Sonora into Arizona on my way to meet you."

"This Arizona is a big place? Like California?"

"Big enough," Cord answered dryly, "to make that too much of a coincidence. Fort Scott is within a day's ride of the Sonora/Arizona territorial boundries."

"Je--sus," Tommy swore helplessly, "keep it up, Cuz, you're gonna get me shot for sure." His hand tightened again on the bay's rein. "You're takin' back the wrong man."

"I don't think so," Cord stated firmly.

"This guy that the bay belongs to...he saw the man who shot him?" Tommy inquired hopefully.

"Yes, enough to put me onto your trail."

"Then he can clear me."

"He wasn't expected to live when I left," Cord's voice was emotionless and tempered with steel. "He's likely dead by now." His hand moved closer to the holstered .44.

"Damn it, I didn't kill any army paymaster! And I didn't shoot your friend!" With it out in the open, Tommy knew he had been right. Cord was on a vengence trail and he, Tommy, was very close to death.

"You fit the description, and damn it, you're ridin' McGuire's bay and the stolen money is still in the bags!"

The sorrel backed another step until it was clear of Avram's chestnut.

"Fill your hand or rein the bay south. I'm through talkin'."

"Tommy?" Avram sat frozen with indecision.

"He means it, Cuz."

"Then we ride." Avram declared simply. "It is a beautiful day for a ride..south."

Tommy mumbled something under his breath, but moved the bay along side the chestnut. They reined the horses southward. The sorrel fell in behind them.

"Tommy, you did not kill this man Cord spoke of?"

"No."

"But you were close to where it happened."

"Cuz, anyone headin' west for the gold fields this time of year comes up from the south. The weather's milder. 'Sides ain't the first time I've spent the winter in mañana land. Mexico's a nice place to visit if you stay clear of her politics."

For a few minutes they rode in silence.

"He didn't tie you, maybe he believes you..."

"He's hoping to push me into a shoot-out." Tommy said. "He doesn't want to take me back any more than I want to go."

"Then we must be very careful."

"Yeah," Tommy agreed. "at least until I can think of someway to get the drop on him."

Avram reined the gelding to a stop.

"Keep movin'," Tommy hissed.

The chestnut moved on. "But why, Tommy?"

"Will you keep your voice down," the Texan warned. "You don't think I'm gonna let him waltz me into that Army post for that hangin', do ya?"

"But you're innocent," Avram paused. "Aren't you?"

"Of course, I'm innocent." Hurt indignation flickered in Lillard's handsome eyes. "But they ain't gonna believe me...over him."

"Why not?" Exasperation tainted the Rabbi's gentle voice.

"Look, Cuz, I'm sittin' a dead man's horse, carryin' a fortune in army payroll and the only man that can clear me is dead! I've seen men hanged on a damned sight less evidence than that."

"Always so much killing in this new country."

"I remember you tellin' me about riders shootin' up towns in your country, Cuz," Tommy reminded his friend, "and innocent people dying. No place is perfect."

"No," Avram agreed sadly. "No place can be perfect."

By mid-day Cord had directed them south and alittle east, as they abandoned the easy travel of the road and headed into the wooded foothills that skirted the Sierras. Another day's ride would take them into the wilderness of California's high country, beautifully wild, but hard, slow travel.

To make the best time they could have swung westward along the more travelled trails and alternatively, into contact with people and camps. This the gunman chose to avoid; he would take no chance of losing his prisoner. Tommy realized, with heart stopping certainty, that Cord was in no hurry to get him back to hang as long as there was any cance he could be forced into the fight he wanted.

It was full dark before they pulled the horses to a weary halt beside the banks of a fast rushing stream they had followed for the better part of the day. Among the thick growth of heavy scented pines and gigantic oaks, the sunset was lost to them. Wordlessly Cord tied the Texan to a large pine while he directed the Rabbi to the care of the horses. He set about making camp.

Tommy remained wisely silent as he worked the knots with hopeless tugs. They were tight. He was helpless and tired, he realized, not so much from the hours in the saddle but from the complexity of his problems. After long hours of contemplation, he had reached the obviously simple conclusion: the man he had shot over a poker hand in Angel's Camp had to have been the man Cord had come in search of. And, the more he pondered the consequences that had brought them together and landed him in his present predictament, the more he realized the situation was not likely to change to his advantage. He, himself, had trouble believing it had happened. What chance did he have in making the gunman believe, a man obsessed with the desire to revenge a friend's shooting..his death, Tommy corrected, for Cord had said his friend was likely dead by now. All during the day, Tommy had puzzled over the few facts he had. The man he had shot had not been <u>that</u> good with a gun. How could he have shot and killed an army paymaster and fatally wounded another man; one, a man trained in the use of weapons and warfare, and the second, a man who wouldn't likely be anything short of a marval with a short gun, if he were any judge of the calibur of a man who would ride at Cord's side. It just didn't make any kind of sense.

He glanced over at the tall man who prepared their evening meal in silence. He had to know more before he could hope to convince Cord of his innocence, but he would have to go slow. Cord was as tightly drawn as the hair trigger of the .44 he carried. Tommy had first hand knowledge of what it meant to have the man as an enemy; he could only wonder at what it would be like to have the tall, silent gunman as a friend.

Avram. The thought of his friend once again crept into his thoughts. So far,Cord had directed all his hate and anger toward him. He could not allow Avram to become immersed in his situation. If Cord sensed, at any time, the Rabbi's willingness to come to his aid, Avram could find himself at the wrong end of the .44. He swore helplessly. As much as he needed the Rabbi's support, his belief in his innocence, he wished Avram had taken the chance Cord had given him to ride away...to go back to San Francisco and the beautiful Jewish wife who awaited his return. In a week they would be overdue. What would Rosalee think? At first, she would not worry much, he told himself, she knew Avram was with him. He grimaced at the thought. She wouldn't be so reassured if she had any inkling of his present predictament and the mess into which her husband had been drawn.

Tommy shifted his weight against his bonds as he studied the back of the tall gunman. The man was human, he assured himself, and it was a long way to Arizona. During the time he would watch the man's every move, study his every mood and wait for a chance to reverse the tables on the gunman. Somewhere, somehow, he would get his chance. He would wait. His eyes grew heavy as the weight of his problems, coupled with the hours in the saddle, claimed him, and he drifted into a restless, dream-filled sleep, unaware of the strange gray-green eyes that studied him.

END OF PART I

Cancelled Debt

Cathie Whitehead

Everything in my life has led
to this moment. I was born
into a world that didn't want me.
Half-breed, Indian and White.
Both, yet neither.
Acceptable to no one,
not even myself.
Father loved Mother, but
hated me, because of his love.
I was too much like her--
I lived, she didn't.
A simple solution:
ignore a mistake and it ceases to exist.
My death is the final payment of a
debt incurred when I was born:
the cost of loving one
who is not of your kind.
Society is one lousy, demanding creditor.

Print

Martynn

Might's well drink me a lake.
Sure's a damn sight better 'n cryin' me
one.

Swillin' spirits 'r swingin' fists
Keeps m' head too busy to think.
An' if that be the death of me,
Leastwise mebbe Pa might notice
His half-injun boy
An' see me as more 'n trouble,
Mebbe talk more soft-like to me
The way he does t' Ma at her grave.
He's got his land and his range war.
Me -- I'd buy the damn sod with my blood
So's he kin have the river
An' mebbe I kin have his tears.

Troubleshooter

Martie Benedict

illustrated by Wanda Lybarger

Han Solo was a happy man. The cash pocket on the inside of his vest was comfortably full of negotiables, his hangover was almost gone, and those mysterious galaxy turns that propelled him erratically toward some unknown destination seemed to be, for the present, all in a benign direction.

Threading his way on foot through the maze of Danis' casino district, heading for a favorite gambling haunt, Solo was tempted to whistle. His lithe figure, hipped and obviously capable, cut a fair swath through the milling crowds. Han was perhaps not the best-looking man on the street, but he thought he was, and that added a good deal to his rather insolent charm.

His mind occupied with nothing more serious than the anticipation of an afternoon of pushing his luck at Sky-slide, the tall Corellian rounded a corner and ran smack into a body moving at full tilt, the initial collision knocking the breath out of both of them with an *OOOF!* in chorus.

Solo's first impression, when he looked down to the sidewalk, was of a large herding dog with a pair of gorgeous legs. His unwitting assailant had landed in a slightly indecent sprawl and Han, though he was by no stretch of the imagination a gentlemen, could, when the occasion demanded, be counted upon to behave in a gallant manner. He enjoyed the diverting view for only a moment before offering his hand to the bewildered girl and pulled her to her feet.

"You O.K.?"

"Oh, yes...Oh, pardon me, I'm so sorry..." the girl began. Unsteady on her fashionable but precarious stilt-pax, and trying futilely to tug down her micro-shift which, at full stretch did just barely clear the tops of her nicely rounded thighs, she was flustered and charming all at once.

From beneath her rioting tangle of tawny hair she pulled a wide disarming grin. "I'm really awfully sorry! I'm supposed to be at a briefing *RIGHT NOW!* And my boss is going to kill me!" Her long, mobile hands churned the air in a sort of comic dismay.

"Well, don't let me keep you, sweetheart. Sure you're O.K. now?"

"Oh, yes. Are *YOU* O.K.? I didn't hurt you, did I?"

Solo was amused to note real distress in her large grey eyes as she peered anxiously from beneath her unruly mop.

"No, I'm fine. Go on, get, you'll be late."

She nodded energetically. "Well, bye then. Take care," she said and took off at a run, managing to nail Solo's left instep with a wicked stilt-pax as she raced away.

"Aaargg!" remarked the spaceman, shifting his weight to his right foot in a little hop that threw him off balance so that he lurched backward, colliding with a surly Laglit.

"Blow off, drunken human-scum", the Laglit snarled as Han went down, cursing roundly. "Human-scum pig," it added, daintily avoiding the Corellian obstacle at its feet.

Han staggered up, his fury almost beyond words, though several pungent maledictions burst from him.

His foot hurt.

Under his breath, with grim determination, he repeated, "It is gonna be a *FINE* day! Never mind some lase-brained honey in blue underwear -- it's gonna be a *FINE* day..."

Several hours later Han Solo wasn't so sure.

Sky-slide being a game of limited variables, it was not long before Solo became aware that he was being hustled, though the subtle gifts of his opponent made it difficult to pin down any definite instance of out-right cheating. Certainly, though, a process of legerdemain was being employed against him, brilliantly employed, and the bottom line was, the stake with which he'd begun the game, and his spirits, had dwindled appreciatively.

Lybarger '81

His opponent was an ordinary looking sort, a blue-eyed Hibandjer with a rich purple pelt and elegant antlerettes, but his bland demeanor appeared to mask the heart, or hearts in the Hibandjer's case, of a game-sharp even wilier than Solo himself, who could fleece most species and leave them smiling.

The dodecahedral dice tumbled across the red playing surface once more, and Solo supressed yet another groan of anguish. Hibandjer's point-plus-six and another sizeable loss. That cut it. More than anything, Solo hated being cheated.

"On spec," he announced, palming the dice with his right hand and pushing the remainder of his cash to the center of the table.

"On spec, huh?" the Hibandjer replied. "Good luck!"

Solo smirked patronizingly, fingered the dice, and with practiced skill gave them a never-fail flick. They came to rest in front of the Hibandjer. Solo gaped in disbelief.

"My point, Spacer," it grinned.

Without thinking, the Corellian lunged to his feet reaching for his gun which, fortunately, he had, like everyone else entering the gaming area, checked with the nubile Arms Hostess. He came up furious but empty-handed. He did, however, offer to beat the living shit out of the Hibandjer, who merely bowed graciously, grinning all the while, pocketed its winnings ("My money," Solo hissed through clenched teeth) and strode to the door where it was met in the shadows by a tall man in a dark business suit who passed it a sizeable sheaf of currency in exchange for the dynamic dice.

Solo was hunched over the bar, blowing the last of his cash reserves in an attempt to sweeten a sour mood with native aqua vit and wondering where everything had gone wrong, when an unctious voice intruded on his glum thoughts.

"Say, I saw what that Hibandjer did to you, friend," it said.

Han looked up, his lip curled in eloquent disgust. The speaker was a human, male, dark hair, dark business suit. Solo looked away disinterestedly. "So?"

"Well, unless I miss my guess, friend, your prospects don't look any too good right now." Han nursed his aqua vit sullenly. "And," the corporate type continued, "I'm looking for someone like you to handle a job for my company. Maybe we could do business, Captain..."

"You know me?"

"Oh, by reputation only. But I hear you're...ah, quite capable --just the man for the job. Are you interested?"

"Interested in what?" Solo drawled, eyeing the other man speculatively. He knocked back the last of his aqua vit, and watched as dark suit signalled the bartender for another.

"What could be a very lucrative assignment, Captain. Will you come with me and have a word with my superior?"

Solo thought a minute, weighing his increasing lassitude against his obvious and urgent need for cash. As usual the money won out. He tossed back the last aqua vit, and for a moment the lassitude almost came out on top, then he chided himself sternly. "O.K.," he replied, "we'll go see your boss."

A little fuzzy at the edges maybe, but Han didn't forget to snag his blaster as they left.

* * *

The glare of Danis' mid-afternoon sun fell gently through a wall-sized sheet of filter glass, bathing the office in a rich amber glow, soothing and pleasant. It was a place of understated luxury which suggested Big Money. Solo would have bet the man across from him seated behind the desk had manicured nails. He would have been right.

His assistant, Solo's dark-suited shadow, introduced him as Mr. Skan. The spacer nodded curtly, hands on hips, and at Skan's polite invitation, eased into a comfortable chair, turning so that he could watch both the interviewer and the door through which he'd come.

"I approve a prudent man," Skan smiled. Solo guessed he didn't smile often. The look was brittle, a mere baring of the teeth in an otherwise cold and watchful face. "Too bad you weren't as prudent earlier today at the gaming table."

"You didn't get me up here to criticize my gambling techniques, did you, 'cause if you did, I got better things to do."

"Really? As I understand it, you're flat out of things to do and that's why you're here." The statement being purely rhetorical, Skan continued, "I represent TREC, Trans Empire Corporation, you've heard of us. We wish to hire your services." He waited for Solo to raise a verbal eyebrow at this, but the spacer was watching him impassively, fist to cheek, though his thoughts had taken on a decidely negative flavor, so Skan went on.

"We've got big trouble on Borodine." Solo registered that.

"The armament planet."

"Exactly. A good percentage of our corporate gross is invested in Borodine guns -- our subsidiary, Star Blaster Enterprises, manufactures half the fire power on Borodine."

"They make roto-crossers, too," Solo added conversationally.

Skan looked annoyed. "*AND* they make *GUNS*, Captain, and for the past month they haven't been able to get one damn blaster off planet, because every time a ship tries to take off with a cargo of Star Blaster freight, it blows up before it clears the atmosphere!"

"That could be a problem," Han said with mock concern.

"You're damn right it's a problem. That's why we need someone to go in there and find out what's happening -- someone who knows his way around the ports, the back alleys, someone with contacts..."

"What makes you think I have contacts?"

"Oh, come off it, Solo," Skan said wearily, "you've been smuggling guns off Borodine for years."

"Me?" asked Han, his features automatically arranging themselves into that look of boyish innocence that Chewie always thought of as 'cub-caught-with-paw-in-Tooco-jar'.

"Yes, you. Don't you think we notice anything? We've logged you in and out -- oh, maybe a dozen times, Captain Solo. We've got enough on you to put your ass in an ARC slammer for a hundred years!" The teeth were bared again, the eyes icy points.

"So that was it." Han had wondered why Skan was being so free with information before he had even agreed to take on the job. They thought to force his compliance by holding those log sheets over his head. Well, it wasn't going to work. Solo had no love for the Trans Empire Corporation, which he considered malignant, bureaucratic and easily as reprehensible as both the ARC Authority and the Corporate Sector Authority, not to mention the Empire itself. And he was not about to do their spy work for them, regardless of the possible reward or punishment.

"What makes you think I want to work for you, Skan? You corporate types give me a headache. Lot of other ways to turn a credit, you know, and about now any of them are looking pretty good."

Skan regarded him briefly, then asked, "Isn't it awfully difficult to fly that four man freighter by yourself?"

"I've got my co-pilot..."

"Correction. *WE'VE* got your co-pilot." Lots of teeth.

"You bastard!" Solo exploded, coming out of his chair with furious speed and blurring his gun into action. "You're gonna get Chewie, and we're both getting out of here right now or you are in serious trouble, Skan," he said tight lipped, leveling his laser at the executive's throat.

Skan cast a glance at dark suit, who nodded once, then remarked with disdain, "Go ahead and fire, Captain. There isn't enough power there to do any damage. We drained the power pack while you were being cheated blind by the Hibandjer with the loaded dice. Sit down."

"You can't do this..." the Corellian began.

"WE ARE TREC! We can do anything!" Skan shouted. Solo sat down. There didn't seem to be a percentage in doing anything else...unless he could somehow get behind Skan, get a clip-lock on the angle between his neck and shoulder, tighten it to the max, maybe a shade beyond...Skan was probably not aware of his danger. He continued to talk. "We need you, Solo, and we're going to have you. You're going to do just what we tell you, or that shaggy partner of yours is on the permanently missing list. Got that?"

Han eyed the exec with undisguised dislike. They were a match for stubbornness, but Skan held the high card -- at the moment, Solo reminded himself. At the moment.

"Now," Skan continued, leaning back and permitting himself a frosty smirk. "You'll be accompanied by one of our agents, just to make sure our interests are protected. One Lethwell Purlee, fresh out of the TREC Academy and ready to tackle anything. I would send a more seasoned operative with you, but in this case it's difficult to know whom to trust -- and Purlee's too new with us to have been suborned. Besides, I think having the Wookiee as a guest in our facility here will insure your every cooperation, right?"

Solo remained stubbornly silent.

"Send in Lethwell Purlee," Skan commanded his intercom.

Immediately the door opened and Solo's jaw dropped. It was the girl in the blue panties.

Lybarger '81

"Well, hi!" she grinned with genuine surprise and delight, seeing Solo. "We're going to be partners, I hear." Lethwell Purlee aimed an exaggerated wink in Han's direction and managed to get something in her eye. She was thus otherwise engaged when Skan said, "There's more to Purlee than you may think, Solo. Just watch yourself. She can also co-pilot your freighter, by the way," he added in a louder voice, "so I suggest you two get underway. Your registry's been temporarily altered for you. You've already got lift-off clearance and Purlee can brief you on anything we've...ah, overlooked in our discussion, Solo."

"Pretty sure of yourself, aren't you, Skan?" Han asked.

"With good reason, Captain. Ask yourself which one of us directs corporate operations from this office and which one of us runs a patched-up cargo hauler half a light ahead of the law."

Solo chose to ignore the jibe. "Skan, besides Chewie, what the hell am I getting out of this?"

"An all-expense paid trip to Borodine, first. Then trouble-shooter-plus double hazard wages on this end. My methods may be a bit unorthodox, but I'm a fair man, Solo, you can trust me to keep my end of the bargain." He was a corporate shark, a high echelon power-merchant and a crook, but for some reason Solo believed him. He didn't like him though.

"You're a real prince, Skan," he said with contempt. The insult slid right off Skan's monumental armor of self-approval. He bared his teeth one more time.

"What make's that blaster you carry, Solo?" he asked.

Han smiled sarcastically, "It's a Kletts-Rushak 460 Blazer, Skan, a fine piece of equipment."

"Kletts-Rushak, hum? Our competitors."

"Yeah. The other half of Borodine."

* * *

The cockpit of the *Millenium Falcon* was at the best of times a cramped space. With Lethwell Purlee in the co-pilot's seat Solo was discovering it to be dangerous as well. When the *Falcon* was safely berthed in hyperspace and automatically vectored toward Borodine, Han turned to his new partner. "Purlee," he bagan.

She turned to him with her disarming grin, and reached out to gently touch the back of his hand, thereby giving him a stinging electric shock. "Han, please call me Lethwell," she said. "It's so much less formal."

"Lethwell. We've got an hour before Borodine, so why don't you fill me in on what we're heading into. Your boss and I didn't have much of a chance to get into details."

"I know," the girl said. She looked away uncomfortably. "I know Mr. Skan pulled a fast one on you. I didn't know it was you, of course. I mean, he said he'd lined up a smuggler who would probably be uncooperative... but here it turns out to be you, and we've already met and everything. Small world, huh?" she ended tentatively, leaning an elbow on the instrument panel and somehow managing to depress the button which activated the escape pod launch sequence, and before Solo could reach across and shut down the jettison initiate, one lonely pod disintegrated in the whirling chaos of n-space.

"Borodine?" he said hastily. "Guns?"

Lethwell had been staring at him speculatively, seemingly oblivious to the pod's demise. Now her eyes widened. "Oh, right," she began briskly, swiveling her chair to face him. Her long legs, her momentum, her absurd footgear, all contrived to bring her left foot soundly into agonizing contact with Solo's right shin.

"Shit!" he yelled, grabbing the abused leg. The girl's face fell.

"Oh, I'm so sorry!"

"Don't," he commanded suddenly. "Don't say a thing. Don't even move. Sit right where you are. Just stay there. I've got a little present for you."

Muttering to himself, Han stalked aft with only a trace of a limp. He slammed through the door to his private compartment, dropped to his knees and rummaged impatiently in a battered foot locker. With a grunt of satisfaction he came up with his quarry -- a pair of small, obviously feminine bootlets. For just a moment a smile softened his features, then he shook his head, muttered some more and stalked back to the cockpit.

Lethwell Purlee sat, embarrassed, hands in her lap, her offending foot tucked under her. She looked up shyly, hearing his approach." I'm really very sorry, Han," she said quietly.

"Forget it, Pur...Lethwell. Here, slip into these and let me space those damn stilt-pax."

"Thank you. They're lovely. Comfortable too," she sighed, wriggling her toes. "Don't really go with the micro, though. But, no matter."

Dropping into the pilot's seat Han asked, "What did you do before you became a TREC trouble shooter?"

"I was a showgirl. You know, tableau dancing?"

It figured -- those incredible legs. "And why'd you quit?"

"Can't you guess?" the girl asked ruefully. "In case you hadn't noticed, accidents seem to happen wherever I go. I only got through TREC training because my test scores were so good. I'm a brain," she explained.

"O.K. then, smart lady, tell me what you know about the situation on Borodine."

* * *

Forty-five minutes later Han knew as much as he cared to about Trans Empire Corporation's merchandising problems. Well up to production, the armament factories were putting out the guns, but none were getting off planet. No ship bearing the TREC intersystem's registry had cleared Borodine's atmosphere in over a standard month. At first, every one attempting to take off had exploded. Then no pilot could be found, nor crew, who'd make the Borodine run for TREC; and now great stockpiles were gathering in the warehouses. Not even smugglers were taking on cargo turned out by Star Blaster anymore, and the words "jinx" and "curse" were being heard, not infrequently above port level, in TREC boardrooms.

Though it was generally assumed Star Blaster's biggest competitor, Kletts-Rushak was responsible for the sabotage, no one had as yet been able to discover how.

Suspecting even his own operatives, Skan, Division Head, Region IV, had decided to play a wild card. And the wild card was a Corellian smuggler named Han Solo.

"So that's it," Lethwell Purlee said, "all we know and a lot we guess."

"You're pretty sure it's Kletts-Rushak?"

"Well, unless it's the rats."

"Rats?" Han was, with Purlee's surprisingly competent assistance, setting the *Millenium Falcon*, temporarily yclept the *Catahoula Compromise*, down behind a blast wall in among a dozen or so other drab tramp freighters.

"Oh, it's definitely Kletts-Rushak, I was just kidding about the rats. It's a local joke. There's this species of intelligent rodent on Borodine. They've stirred themselves up into some sort of movement, trying to get the local government to grant them second class citizen status. They've got spokespersons, and they stage marches and media events to get publicity. It's really funny." Purlee flicked the final set of switches, nodded with satisfaction as the *Falcon's* hydraulic struts eased her weight down with a sigh, then gave Han a quick smile. "They call it Vermin's Liberation!"

Han's first stop, with Purlee in tow, was the herb shop of Soffalet the Jas, a place the Corellian never failed to visit when he made Borodine planetfall. It was here he gathered a supply of Mancet and all the gossip current around the North Quadrant Spaceport.

"An herbalist?" Purlee questioned in a whisper.

Solo nodded, ushering her into the dark, cool interior of Soffalet's Herbarium. They waited a moment among the hanging baskets and bundles of exotic vegetation, eyeing the shelves full of stoppered jars.

Presently the herbalist appeared, seeming to materialize out of a large fern. "Ah, Captain Solo! Welcome," he beamed. A short, pale humanoid, Soffalet the Jas was affable and talkative. "So fine to see you again. And the Wookiee? Where is the huge Wookiee?"

"He missed this trip, Soffalet. My friend Purlee's along for the ride this time."

"Purlee," the Jas cackled, "lovely, lovely! Excellent taste, my Corelli friend. Welcome to my establishment, lovely Purlee."

"Uh...thanks," the girl smiled, bending down to shake his proferred hand.

"And how can this humble Jas be of service to you, Captain Solo?"

"Just information today, Soffalet. Can we talk in the back?"

"Assuredly, my friend, assuredly. Come this way." The Jas slipped the lock on the entrance and led the way toward the rear of the little shop.

Over a drink of something that took Purlee completely by surprise, Solo questioned Soffalet about the gun problem.

"A curse? This very superstitious Jas says *No*. It is Kletts without any doubt. He is at the bottom, though no one has discovered how he does it. The ships, when they were taking off at all, were guarded, the shipments searched...You see, the cargo ships were not shot down -- they simply exploded, oh, so far," Soffalet gestured with his hand above the table, "so far off planet. No one knows why."

"And the smugglers? No one's even trying any more?"

Soffalet looked unhappy. "It is a great misfortune, Captain. Two weeks ago the Medwaller Sisters and Big Bruk the Equalizer blew in with a Starwind Jammer frigate and announced publically they were leaving with it full of Star Blaster armaments..."

"And?"

"Ah, Solo, the Medwaller Sisters will sport no more."

Han thought it a sad loss. He observed a moment of silence in their memories. Very nice memories. "So everything's just shut down?"

"Kletts-Rushak still ships of course, and a few of the smaller weapons manufacturers, but no one will touch a Star Blaster cargo. It was rumored the Empire might even take a hand..."

Solo snorted in disgust. "Keep 'em out of the ARC. We'll handle our own problems," he said with an almost proprietary fondness for his present corner of the galaxy.

"My sentiments exactly, but what are you and the lovely Purlee -- if I may make so bold as to ask --thinking of doing?"

"Well, Purlee here works for...*Ow!*" She'd nailed him on the instep again, and he was pretty sure it had not been an accident this time.

"Uh...I'm sort of a smuggler's apprentice, Soffalet," the girl said conspiritorily. "You know, learning the ropes from an old hand? Han thought the challenge of taking a Star Blaster cargo off Borodine would be good experience for me."

Solo's face was composed and unhelpfully free of expression. He was thinking, *Chewie, Chewie, Chewie, what I do for you...*

Soffalet looked from one to the other, obviously mystified. "You are, pardon me, Corelli friend, most crazy! No one takes Star Blasters off Borodine."

"Well, they sure don't do it before dinner, Soffalet, and I think the lady and I will cruise around and grab a bite somewhere. Somewhere quiet where we can have a little talk," he added meaningfully. "Thanks for the drink. As usual you've been a help."

"My pleasure, Captain. Anytime. Ah, before you go -- perhaps a sniff?"

Han, who usually preferred to drink his highs, declined the spice politely, but Lethwell was intrigued. "I never had any before. Don't look so surprised," she explained. "Besides, I just want to try a tiny bit."

As Soffalet tapped out a small mound of greenish crystals into Purlee's outstretched hand, Han reflected with good natured resignation that Purlee straight was a handful, stoned she would probably be a menace to navigation.

"Just...ah...that's right. Just inhale, through your nose and mouth at the same time. Imbibe it. Make you feel fine, lovely smuggler Purlee," Soffalet encouraged.

"Whoo...oooh..." the girl offered, knocking it back with the most original spice 'hand' Solo had ever seen. Too late he recognized the look on her face. "Haaach-zshoo!" She sneezed, nearly blowing poor Soffalet down. "Haach-zhoo! Haach-zhoo!" She leaned helplessly over the table to brace herself as another paroxysm ravaged her nose.

"Sorry, Soffalet," Han grinned ruefully. "One in a billion -- and she's got to be it."

The Jas safely distant, made little placating gestures.

"Oh, Han...Aaagh...pfoo...hell! Aaach-choo!" was about all Lethwell Purlee could manage.

"Come on, honey, let's get you..." Solo started, coming up behind her with an arm about her waist at the same moment Purlee decided to sneeze again. Drawing a huge breath, she pushed herself up from the table and caught Solo right in the teeth with the back of her head.

"Ow! Goddammit, Purlee, take it easy!" He was tasting blood. "Soffalet, later," the Corellian announced, and taking the girl's hand he dragged her from the wide-eyed herbalist's shop. But not before she'd knocked over the large fern.

* * *

By recent standards, dinner had been a tame affair. The TREC agent had done nothing worse than spill a drink in his lap. But she had been most evasive when he'd tried to discover anything personal about her. She had eaten and smiled and gestured self-deprecatingly whenever he'd probed for specifics until he'd finally given up. Now, heading back toward the *Falcon* and still miraculously on speaking terms, for the first time they noticed the rats. Not particularly large or menacing rats, just a huge quantity of rats. Scuttling everywhere, they gave a surreal sense of motion to the dark street, a watery feel as the infrequent glow spots positioned at intersections reflected off their many scurrying backs.

"Ever see so many rats?" Lethwell asked as they walked.

Han shook his head. "Intelligent, you said?"

"That's what I heard." She looked at them curiously, glad that rodent phobia was not among her problems. "But I kind of doubt it. They don't look very smart, do they?"

"Up yours, sweetheart!" squeaked a tiny voice at their feet.

Purlee gasped and grabbed Han's arm.

A small gray beastie winked red eyes at them and scurried off into an alley.

"That satisfy you? Look," he said, determined to try again, "before we go any further, Lethwell, let's get a few things understood -- like what, exactly, you're doing here -- with me -- on Borodine."

"Well," the girl sighed, "it's like this..."

Suddenly Solo clamped a hand to her mouth and, with an eloquent look, pulled her into the alley. "Not a word," he whispered in her ear. She nodded. He released her, whispered again, "Just saw someone I recognized."

"You always hide from your friends in alleys?"

"Who said anything about friends? I just saw Rynar of Rodi, no friend of mind, I promise you."

"Rynar of Rodi?"

"Also known as The Preacher. And whatever he's doing on Borodine, sure as hell it's got something to do with the guns."

"Why do you call him The Preacher?" Purlee moved closer to Solo, and he took the opportunity to circle her trim waist with his arm. Her scent was subtle, interesting and it was very nice to have her lips next to his ear. He collected his thoughts. "He used to be. A charismat. One of the old religions. His church kicked him out when they found out he was using his pull to line his own pockets instead of theirs. He's got a... magnetism, I guess you'd call it. Gets people to do what he wants. Never hurt for females, I can tell you, and he's a scruffy-looking dude."

"Like the Force?" Purlee had slid an arm around Han.

"What's the Force?" he asked absently.

"Never mind. Is he gone yet?"

"Yeah, I think so. Look, I want to check this out with Soffalet. If anyone knows what Rynar's doing on Borodine, Soffalet does. Come on...".

* * *

The *Millenium Falcon* poised silently on her landing gear in the low-lit docking area behind the blast wall. Around her other space craft hung in utter stillness.

Except for the rats. Like lines of turbulent water, columns of rodents converged on the *Falcon*, scuttling up her landing gear and finding tiny areas of ingress not automatically ship-sealed within the atmosphere.

Wriggling in by the hundreds, they made their way forward, each one bearing a tiny mouthful of altitude-sensitive explosive. One by one they deposited their little loads at a central location until a sizeable ball of the stuff formed, a malignant lump that spelled death for the *Millenium Falcon*, and whoever was unlucky enough to be aboard her when she cleared the ionosphere.

* * *

"Door's unlocked," Han muttered.

Suddenly Purlee clutched his arm. "Don't. Don't go in there," she said urgently.

"Huh? Why not?"

"I...I don't know. Just don't. Someone...something's there."

"Yeah, probably Soffalet," Han grinned, but he eased his blaster clear of the holster and flicked off the safety. "Wait here," he instructed the girl.

"Han, be careful," she said.

The shop was dark, cool and redolant. Solo slid around the door jamb and, pressing his shoulders against the wall, moved soundlessly toward the overhead light switch. He sensed something definitely not-right, but was puzzling over it's essense when he heard the sound of scuffling at the door, and then Purlee let out a yelp.

Swearing, Han whirled.

"Help, Han!" Purlee yelled, then cried out angrily as a hand covered her mouth. Solo took a step in the direction of the door and tripped over something sprawled among the potted vegetation. A body. Soffalet's body.

"Purlee! Hang on!" he hollered when something slammed into the back of his head with telling force. His lights dimmed quickly, but as he went down with a stiffled cry he saw, or thought he saw, small red eyes watching him.

* * *

The lights came up with theatrical speed. Han registered a small, plush, intimate room more like a boudoir than anything else he could name. He also registered a comforting warm body close to his. Purlee shifted sleepily, moaning a little.

Solo roused himself a bit awkwardly and did a quick turn around the room. The single door was, of course, locked. With a wry grin, Solo drew a chair over and propped it against the door handle. It would not only give them (whoever 'they' were) a surprise, but it would give him a warning. He came back and dropped to a sitting position, pulling the girl up against him, an arm about her shoulders, her head cradled against his chest. They sat on the floor of the low-lit, sumptiously furnished suite, upon the lush carpet, and leaned against a divan.

"Hey, you O.K.?" Han asked with an unaccustomed touch of tenderness. The girl looked fragile and vulnerable, disheveled and thoroughly helpless.

"I'm all right." She made to snuggle closer, and Han braced himself for the inevitable elbow or knee in a vital spot he'd come to associate with Lethwell Purlee, but all that happened was that she snuggled closer. "I am scared, though," she whispered. "Where are we?"

"No idea. But as prisons go, it could be worse." The girl snuggled even closer. Han sensed she had something important to say. He encouraged her by gently ruffling her hair. It was thick and springy and it smelled wonderful.

"Han..."

"Ummm?"

"Han, I don't want to die a virgin."

"You're not gonna...a *WHAT?*"

"Sounds silly, doesn't it? Everything else around me breaks so easily."

He was momentarily at a loss.

"Han, I...I like you very much. You're really awfully attractive..."

"Uh, Purlee, if you're suggesting what I think you're suggesting..."

"I like you very, very much." She kissed him.

Returning her kiss with conviction, Han's mind lept to several perfectly good reasons why her suggestion was crazy, and just as swiftly his body discarded them all. Her hands were very busy, and somehow her gorgeous legs had become entangled with his. He cooperated with the inevitable.

"Purlee..."

"Lethwell," she corrected.

"Leth..." It was a caress.

"Oh, Han..."

"Just lean back. Very, very, very carefully."

"Oh, Han..."

"Um...you are beautiful."

"Oh, Han..."

"Relax, Leth..."

"Oh, Han...*OW!*

"I'm sorry."

"I'm not."

* * *

The voice that intruded into their post-pleasure lethargy was small, squeaky and impatient. It contrived somehow, though lacking in timbre, to convey a delicate disdain.

"Are you humans quite through?" it piped.

"Huh?" Han, who had assumed the room was unoccupied, raised his head curiously and looked around. As he was quite close to the floor at the time, he found himself eye to eye with a small, rather disapproving rat.

"I said, 'Are you humans quite through?'. I may not have much volume, but my command of Standard is excellent."

"Leth, Leth," Han nudged the quietly smiling girl. "We've got company."

Behind his chivalrously presented back, Lethwell tidied up.

"Haven't we met before, friend?" Han asked the crouching rodent.

"I insulted your mating partner there over on Numa Street, for which I apologize. I did not know who you were then..."

"And you do now?"

"More or less. Also I observed the incident in the herbalist's shop. You see, I overheard you in the alley, discussing Rynar the Preacher. Your comments intrigued me and I followed you."

"You know who did this?" Han made a general sweep, indicating their present predicament.

"The Preacher's men, of course."

Han considered that for a moment. "You got a name?" he asked finally.

"Of course!" replied the rat with dignity. "We may be small but we are cultured. You may call me Gripophase lup Tachron, or just Tac for short."

"Thanks, Tac," said Han amiably. "Now, do you suppose you could brief us, (Purlee, rosy-cheeked and looking demurely pleased, had curled at his side) on just what the hell's going on around here?"

"Indeed," the little rat squeaked. "It all began with Kletts-the-bastard, a greedy villan who would put his chief competitor out of business. He imported off-planet aid in the person of Rynar the Preacher -- a nefarious move! Our people were just getting their consciousness raised, understanding the nature of their rathood, and Rynar exploited that. How cleverly he manipulated our emotions! He told us, for example, that Trans Empire Corporation and their subsidiary Star Blaster discriminated against rats. So what? Everyone discriminates against rats! Oh....But I personally believe Rynar is acting on his own now. He is a madman, driven by desire for power. It sickens me." Tac slowed down in sheer disgust, and Han and Purlee traded a pair of unreadable glances.

"How come he never convinced you?" Han wanted to know.

"I? I come from a long line of cynics, Captain. We may be sociologically insignificant..."

"...but you have all the finer perceptions. I know." Han finished for him. "O.K. Look, I sympathize. I'm on your side..."

"Do not patronize me, Captain."

"Who's patronizing? Don't be so touchy. I am on your side, and I'll do what I can to help. But I need information first. The ships. How does Kletts blow them up?"

"Altitude-sensitive explosive. Rynar orders us to rig all outgoing ships with Star Blaster cargo."

"Amazing, and so simple," Lethwell commented.

"And Soffalet," Han asked. "What'd they do to him?"

"A blaster-bolt to the back of the head when they heard you coming. Rynar has men in his employ as well as misguided people."

Solo was sorry about the garrulous herbalist. The problem was rapidly becoming a personal one.

"And where are we now?"

"A reception area off the main hall of Rynar's House of Worship. He 'receives' females here while in the main hall," and here Tac's small voice seemed to tremble with emotion," he deceives my people with lies!"

"O.K., steady kid," Han said thinking quickly. He was about to ask one further question about the altitude-sensitive explosive when there was a commotion at the door. Tac jumped a foot. "I will do what I can for you and your mating partner," he squeaked, and vanished.

"Up, and ready to run for it!" Solo commanded. They took up positions on opposite sides of the door, just as the chair gave way and several armed men burst into the room.

The first man in reeled drunkenly as Solo delivered a lightening jab from the shoulder, breaking his jaw. He toppled forward toward Purlee who should, by all rights, have gone down beneath his weight in a tangle. But she sidestepped with surprising agility, a move Solo saluted with a raised eyebrow, before the rest of Rynar's crew forced their way through the door,and, by sheer dint of numbers, overcame the defenders.

Solo, arms pinned behind him, endured a series of short, painful blows to the midsection while Purlee, likewise restrained, screamed maledictions at their attackers. Suddenly the punishment and the screaming stopped.

Han looked up. The Preacher stood in the doorway, looking not at him, but at Purlee. Drawing a painful breath Han was about to warn the dark, sharp-eyed man off that particular territory, when he realized Purlee was possessed of an intense, uncharacteristically serious expression. She stood straight, feet planted apart, her pose challenging, head lifted, eyes intent on Rynar. The Preacher appeared to shiver beneath his long mantle. As Solo watched uncomprehendingly, he drew himself up to match the girl's posture, giving her the fierce stare of a predator. Wordlessly they fenced with invisible weapons while Han stared in fascination at the strange and wonderful change that had come over Lethwell Purlee.

Presently, however, she breathed a sigh and slumped dejectedly. "Not yet, not yet," she muttered. The Preacher laughed sharply.

"Don't toy with powers beyond your comprehension, woman!" he intoned. "I can carve you into pieces and eat the pieces, and you know it. So let's have no more foolishness."

The TREC agent, her irrepressible spirits rebounding quickly, glared defiance at Rynar of Rodi. She even managed a wry conspiritorial smile. "He doesn't know everything," she assured the Corellian.

Han was thinking back, something Skan had said, an allusion to Lethwell's being more than he imagined. *"Could this be what he meant? What was the girl up to?"*

Ignoring her for a moment, Rynar came face to face with Solo.

"You got hydraulics in your shoes, Preacher? Don't look as runty as the last time I saw you," Han sneered.

Rynar fixed Solo with the predatory stare and silently suggested that the pilot at once suffer excruciating pain in his right side. Han felt it hit him and began to double over when it occurred to him the Preacher was manipulating him. He denied the pain, straightened and refused to accept it, throwing it back at Rynar. "Go play tricks on your rats," he said through clenched teeth.

"Captain Solo," Rynar replied with relish, "I would enjoy teaching you a lesson in civility, but there is another, more pressing appointment that you and the ambitious lady must keep." He smiled unpleasantly then grew suddenly menacing. "I have a mission on Borodine," he whispered, his eyes glittering with a sheen of madness Solo did not remember from their last meeting. "A holy mission in which your interference will not be tolerated. You are going to leave my planet, you Corellian trash, in your ship. Your fine ship full of Star Blaster weapons -- a common smuggler plying his trade."

"And when the altitude's just right..."

"The Curse, Captain. The Curse...Boom," the Preacher said nastily. "Take the Corellian and the female to their ship."

And helplessly, Lethwell and Han were herded at gunpoint out into the quiet Borodine night.

* * *

The interior of the *Millenium Falcon*, which should have looked welcoming with its familiar, well-worn pattern of contours and angles, now appeared to Han Solo as a cold place, alien and deadly. He mistrusted every inch of the bulkheads, and the false floor beneath his feet, as he and Lethwell were prodded along the corridor to the cockpit.

"She's been set on a star course, Captain. You don't have to do a thing." Rynar fumbled beneath his robe, drawing out Han's blaster. "Here. Go out armed at least," he smiled, handing the uncharged gun, butt first to its owner.

"Go to hell, Preacher," replied Han, holstering the useless weapon.

"If it's any comfort to your final moments, Captain, you've played your part in a Divine Plan. I and my followers have been chosen to rule this planet of death. Even you," he turned a weirdly benign glance on the smouldering Purlee, "even you were prophesied, and will now fulfill your destiny."

"Go away," she said simply.

Rynar made a mock bow. "Clear skies, then, the both of you. And...oh! My men have pulled all the overrides. Your journey will be swift and soon over." With a flourish of his cloak, Rynar of Rodi turned and exited the cockpit. His followers trained their guns on Solo and Purlee for several beats, then backed out warily. A moment later the hatch slammed shut and the *Falcon's* high gravity engine fired.

Cautiously, the two prisoners lowered themselves into the control seats. As the starship heaved herself off the ground, her landing gear whining up into flight position, Purlee declared in a remarkably composed tone, "I'll bet you've got a lot of regrets now."

"Just one," Han answered.

"Tell me."

"That I didn't find out from Tac just where in hell they stashed the explosives."

She was climbing smoothly through the atmosphere at minimum boost without her captain's reckless, driving accelleration. It was an irony Han Solo appreciated.

He watched the read-outs; mind running ahead of his ship out into the star-dark which was the only home he knew, the rich, endless beauty and freedom that had been his life. His gaze drifted up and out.

Purlee had to raise her voice to get his attention.

"Han! I think -- listen to me! -- I think I can find the explosives."

"You what?"

"There's no time to explain. Just...just..." the girl had drawn into herself, controlled, gray eyes fixed on some scenario Han couldn't see. She drew a breath, let it out slowly.

"It's a mass...purple...about the size of my fist. Han, it's nearby."

The *Falcon's* captain watched in fascinated silence as Purlee reached out with invisible fingers to search the ship. The corner of his eye caught the altimeter. Adrenalin surged.

"Han, it's under something...warm...get down!" she commanded. "Look! Please!"

Solo was on his knees at once, scrabbling beneath the control console running sweating palms over the shadowed surfaces. The *Falcon* began to pick up speed as her big Hauler cut in, forcing her upward through the ever-diminishing layers of resistance.

"Malfunction, you big bird," Han whispered. "You've done it enough before. Do it for me now!"

"Han, the seats! It's on one of the stabilizers! Go! Go!" Purlee dropped to the floor, ski-jewing around the base of the co-pilot's seat, grasping frantically at the shock absorbing struts on its underside. "Not here, not here! Hurry!" she cried.

The pilot's seat was clear.

The surge of the *Falcon's* hyperdrive warming for jump pulsed through the floor and throbbed against Han's belly and thighs as he snaked across the cockpit to the navigator's station. He slammed his hand upward, desperately hoping -- and was rewarded by contact with a firm, pliable excrescence that fitted his grasp perfectly.

"I've got it!"

The hyperdrive was a steady roar now. Han struggled up, clasping the lump of explosive. Purlee simply yelled, urging him on with pure emotion, as he flung himself aft, racing his own ship for his life.

The escape pods lay like eggs in a nest -- five silver, silent globes and one burnt out shell where Purlee had so long ago, a day perhaps, caused an inadverant jettison.

The girl's scream merged with the engine's howl as the *Falcon* strained against the last vestiges of gravity. Han thrust the handful of explosive into the nearest pod, slammed the hatch and hit the eject.

He waited, gasping, tremors coursing through his body. One...two... The enormous concussion sent him sprawling. Things went red, then black, then Purlee was in his arms, clutching him with relief and joy.

"Oh, you did it! You did it!" she sobbed over and over again, rocking a little and planting small, swift kisses all over his face.

"Hey..." he began, attempting to sit up.

"Han, we're alive! You did it!" the girl laughed.

"Me? You did it, honey. I don't know what you've got, but it works."

"I guess I can tell you now..."

"Business first, Leth," Han said, climbing painfully to his feet. "The *Falcon* just went super light and the sooner we hang a U-turn the better."

* * *

"...and I've known about it for a long time. It's a source of power I can tap, but so erratically!" Lethwell explained. "When I'm not consciously directing it, and sometimes even when I am, well, that's why all the

Lybarger '81

mayhem wherever I go. But TREC wanted the gift I had anyway. Some gift!" She grinned. "Mr. Skan didn't like being in the same room with me. Up until today! Today it really worked! I'm applying it and directing it almost without thinking..." The gray eyes searched Han's face intently. "My instructors said I needed to 'mature' a bit, that was their word. Do you think...could they have meant...?"

Solo chuckled. He cocked his head and regarded her with narrowed eyes. "I've heard of crazier things, Leth."

"Are you so irresitble, Han?" Purlee smiled incredulously, looking away from the pilot for a moment. "This is crazy," she declared. "So completely irresistable..."

"Well, no one's 100%, darlin'."

"Han, I feel used and manipulated, don't you?" She turned to face him -- smoothly, gracefully, her knee brushing his with the gentlest kiss of contact.

"Maybe, but in this particular case I'm gonna ignore my instincts." He leaned forward and took her hands, brought them palm-together to his lips and kissed the tips of her fingers. "Feel like taking on the Preacher now?"

"You bet I do!" She slid her hands around his face, holding him contemplatively for a moment. "You know," she said happily, "I feel more 'liberated' than any rat."

* * *

There appeared to be a standing-room-only crowd for dawn services at Rynar's House of Worship.

Moving through the dim light Solo and Purlee approached the converted warehouse. His blaster, fully charged off the *Falcon's* cells, rested comfortingly in his right hand. Purlee was unarmed, but lethal. Even in the travel-worn micro and soft bootlets Solo thought she looked great.

"Remember the lay-out when they took us through the main hall?" She nodded. "Well, I'll give you five minutes to get into position at the...What the hell?" Something was crawling up his leg. It reached his boot top and clung there staring up at him with little red eyes. "Tac!"

"At your service, Captain," the rat replied.

Solo reached down and offered it a hand.

"Thank you," it responded, "climbing humans can be quite taxing. Congratulations on your survival."

"Thanks, Tac," said Han to the rodent on his palm. He stared squarely at the beastie, mentally adding another small weapon to his arsenal of surprise. "Look, do you suppose..." he began, as ideas chased themselves around in his head. "Suppose you could do us a favor?"

"If it will help you to stop the evil Preacher, I will do all I can."

"Good, then listen..."

* * *

Dispatching the latest obstacles in the way of his manipulative megalomania had put Rynar the Preacher in a fine mood. He stood at the head of the room, a lecturn before him, and delivered an incendiary sermon. His power, like waves, washed over the assemblage, the preponderance of which was made up of rats, though a fair number of other species were represented, including his human henchmen.

So great was the force he exerted even Solo, flat against a rear wall in the shadows, felt the persuasive pull of it. He spoke of revolution and conquest, exhorting his followers to ever more daring acts of sabotage, and Solo thought that without the protection the powerful Kletts was able to afford him, the Preacher would have been carted off ranting to the bastinado some time ago. As it was, the Corellian suspected not even Kletts realized just how dangerous a creature he'd let loose in his own territory.

Rynar was hitting his climax, punching his delivery with a dramatic pause. He drew a breath. There was total silence, shattered jarringly by a new voice -- cool, clear, powerful, it rang out over the audience.

"Rynar of Rodi!" Solo smiled. Purlee had located the audio hook-ups.

The Preacher's eyes were large dark holes, his face a study in fury. He recognized the voice.

"Who speaks?" he demanded.

"The gods deny you, Oh Preacher of lies!"

"Show yourself, False Prophetess!"

The congregation had frozen at the intrusion of the second voice. The hall was still, all eyes and photo receptors on the dias when Purlee made her entrance. In one of Rynar's magnificent mantles, her wealth of hair static-charged out to it's full sweep, she looked, indeed, other-worldly. The crowd murmured and chittered.

"The gods' wrath shall destroy you," intoned Rynar for the benefit of the audience, and in a low voice pitched for her alone, he added, "but I shall be their executioner."

Lethwell faced him from the right, impassive. "Do your worst, charlatan," she said, and even without audio boost her powerful voice carried to the rear of the hall. "The gods deny you!"

Several of Rynar's armed followers began to converge on the platform. Solo levelled his blaster. "Nobody move!" he shouted. The men hesitated.

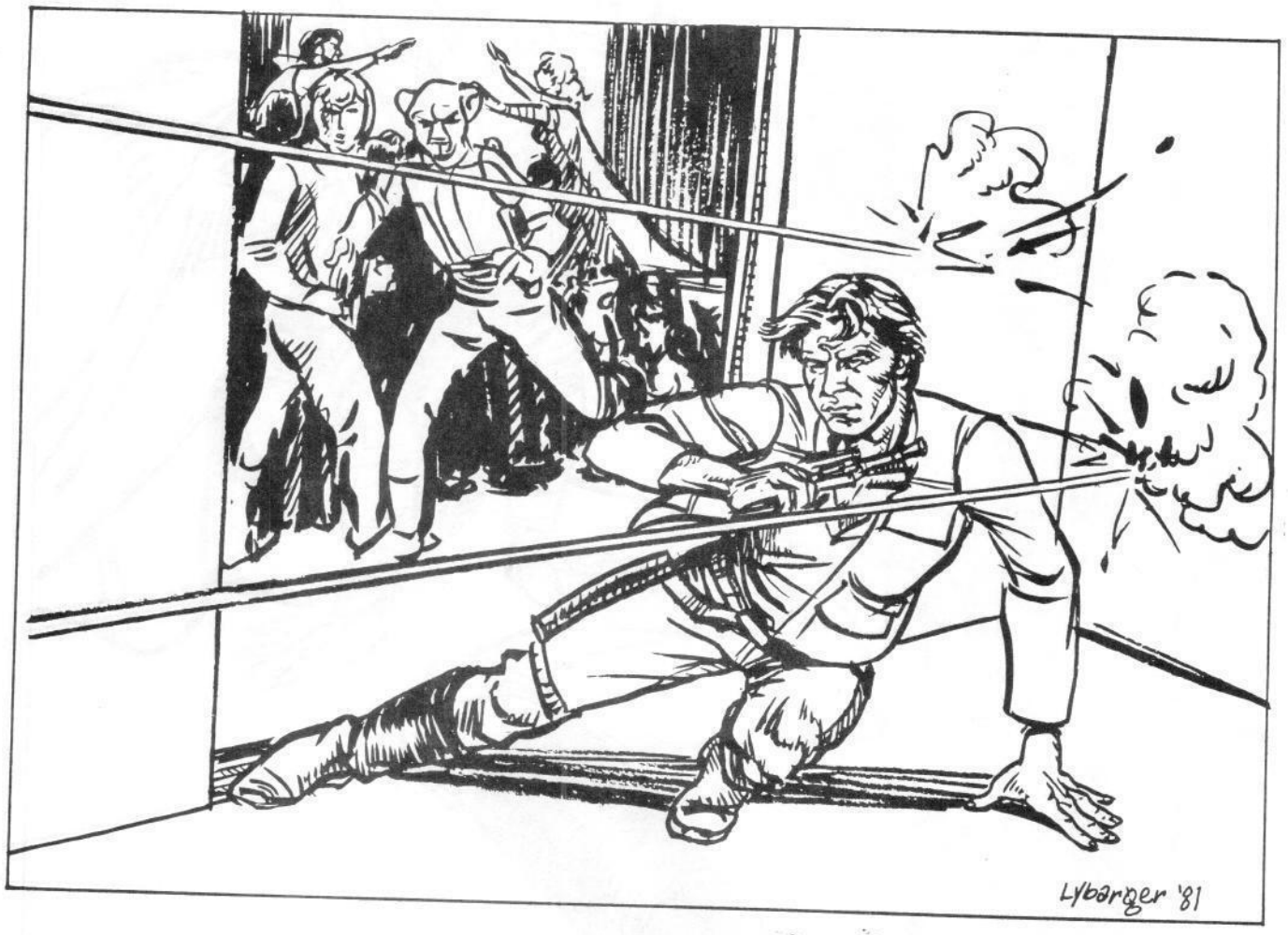
"Kill him!" screamed the Preacher, then abruptly doubled over in pain as Lethwell lashed out at him with her force.

Solo saw Rynar clutching the lecturn, straightening, and the girl staggering back with a cry -- then he was surrounded by lase-flash.

He ducked through the main doors, firing over his shoulder and found himself caught in a deadly cross-fire as guards stationed in the foyer turned and began to hurl a heavy barrage in his direction.

With the speed of a whip lash, Solo reversed momentum, throwing himself into the alcove behind a pillar, lasebolts cutting chips from the masonry all around him with a whining hiss. He locked the 460's trigger and, two-handed, raked the entrance way. Guards fell. Pinned down inside the main hall, the Corellian could only hope Tac had kept the courage of his convictions.

He inched forward slightly still hugging the wall, to get a clear shot at one of Rynar's warily circling men. He could spare only the briefest consideration of the tableau on the dias, but he saw Purlee was still on her feet, locked in a combat of wills with the sinister Preacher. He squeezed off three rapid bursts and pulled back into the small shelter of the pillared alcove, just as one of the snipers who had him pinned down drilled his right leg with a needle beam.



Biting back the cry, he felt his leg slide out from under him, useless, drawing him down into the sniper's main line of fire. He swore furiously, opened up the 460 in another trigger-lock and tried to throw his weight backwards as he staggered and went down.

Upon the dias, Rynar had made the mistake of underestimating his opponent's strengths. Attempting to deal with Purlee and at the same time keep control of his parishoners had cost him pain. Now he exerted himself more

completely in Lethwell's direction. His confused, agitated followers watched excitedly as she groaned, his long-practiced technique riveting her with agony.

The woman marshalled herself, retaliated. The thought of Han, in danger nearby, flickered in her consciousness. She wavered, feeling Rynar's power like hands reaching out to encircle her throat. Thrusting all but the thought of power unleashed from her mind, Lethwell Purlee hurled her very best shot at the malevolent madman. He stiffened with a cry, black eyes wide and staring. Blood began to trickle, then gush, from his nostrils, his lips. He clutched at his chest, knees giving way beneath him.

Lethwell held him up, held the flaccid body in the powerful grip of her will and very gently draped it across the platform for all to see.

Suddenly a single rat in the center of the hushed crowd began to leap up and down, hopping madly and screeching in its small rat-voice, over the whine and sizzle of energy weapons, "He's dead! Dead! God is dead! Run! Run!" Tac was doing his part.

Lase-fire shrieked past Han's ears, slicing closer and closer, sooner or later sure to find its mark. With a fatalistic shrug Solo continued firing. He was wondering grimly where the damn rat was, when he heard the cry, and all hell broke loose. Han threw himself prone across the floor, elbows propped, blasting one fiery arc, and then the rats were on him.

Lying flat out, shielding his face with his arms as thousands of small furry bodies raced across his back, Solo missed the spectacle of Rynar's gunmen being swept away, fighting and screaming beneath the carnivorous wave which, released at last from its bondage to the Preacher's machinations, behaved in its customary rat-like manner.

Purlee slowly descended the platform, following the receding wave, directing a protective aura over Solo's body, watching the remaining parishoners, human and nonhuman, scatter wildly out into the sunrise.

She reached Han at last. But for the two of them and Rynar's body, the hall was empty. He pushed himself up on all fours as she sank to the ground beside him.

In a moment they were sitting companionably together, backs against the wall, his wounded leg stretched out before him.

"Long night," he remarked, yawning.

"Yep."

"Leth?"

"Umm?"

"You're something else." He ruffled her hair.

* * *

Tac scuttled across the control board of the *Millenium Falcon*, busily investigating each lever, dial, button, and switch. Occasionally, he asked a question which Purlee fielded as well as she could.

Presently, Han swung into the cockpit and sidled easily into the pilot's chair. "We're all set. Cargo's secured, clearance to lift. Seen enough, Tac?"

"Fascinating, Captain Solo. Thank you for the run of your ship," piped the little rat.

"My pleasure," replied Solo with a wry grin. It would be good to see Chewie again, he reflected, but he thought he would probably miss Tac, too, for a little while. "Well, I guess this is it, friend. Good luck shaping up those new followers of yours."

"They do look up to one a bit," Tac admitted modestly.

"Just don't forget Rynar's mistakes. People like their freedom, you know."

"A good point, Captain. Goodbye. Goodbye, Mistress Purlee. It's been an honor knowing you."

"Goodbye, Tac. Good luck." Lethwell reached out and stroked his whiskers. Tac hopped onto her lap, down to the floor and skittered away. In a moment Solo closed the hatch.

"Ready?" he asked.

"Let's clear the ground."

As the ship raced starward under his usual maximum accelleration, Han said thoughtfully, "You know, TREC went to a lot of trouble and expense to arrange this mission. Getting the two of us together and all..." He paused a moment, watching the beautiful woman beside him. "Lot of expense," he repeated, "to get the two of us together. At, oh, say, a third of maximum, it could take us...days to get back to Danis. Don't you think we really ought to..."

She grinned lasciviously and finished for him, "...give them their money's worth?"

Han Solo, how do you spell relief?

D-E-F-R-O-S-T

Advancement

Leia...?
Hey, wait a minute.
I wasn't finished yet!

Well, looks like I'm finished now.
"You're welcome," he says. Shit.
Just when I was finally getting somewhere.

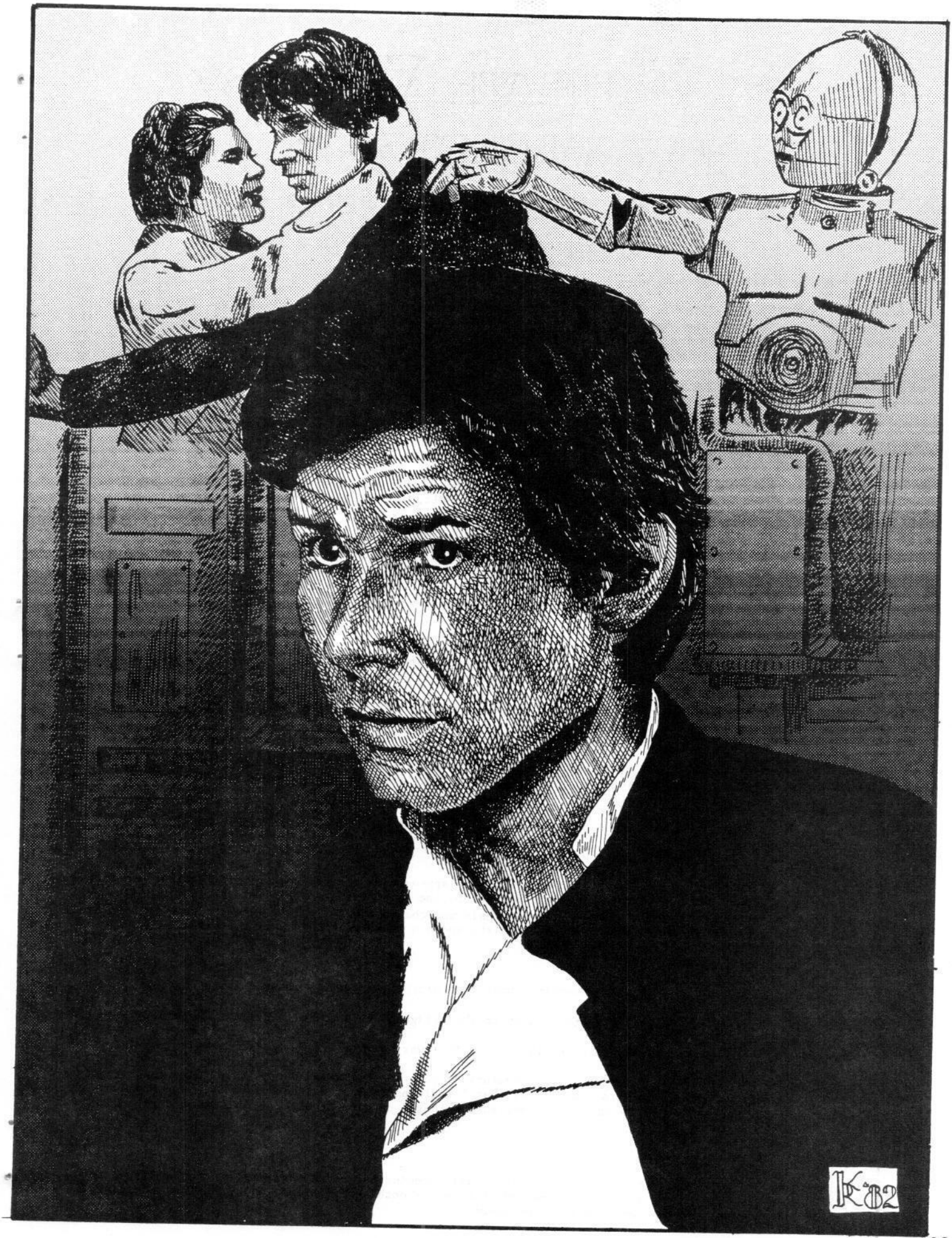
Great place for it, Solo.
An asteroid cave in a ship that won't fly
With a droid looking over your shoulder.

Not to mention half the Imperial fleet
Trying to shake things up out there.
Just what I need right now.

Takes three years to get her away from Luke
For three lousy minutes, and--
Aw, hell. Guess it could be worse.

I mean, this morning I was a nerf-herder.
Now she's calling me a scoundrel.
No doubt about it. I'm moving up fast!

Jacqueline Taero



The Ultimate Fan-tasy

Eva Albertsson

illustrated by Barb Stultz

Hi. My name is Dulcinea Dreamer, and I'm a zine reporter.

When SPACE HAPPY, Zaniest Zine in the Zodiac, decided to send me out on this crazy mission to interview the Mad Scientist on the Verge of the Black Hole, my first question was, could I take a photographer? They said, by all means, but they could not print photos because of the fierce costs involved; so I went alone.

You can Imagine my Misgivings and Excitement, as my ship slowly approached the *Cygnus* which was solemnly floating in a beautiful blue mist a few miles away from its Purple Hole - or rather, you can't, but we'll skip that part anyway.

My request to come aboard this bulky Swan was immediately granted - to my tremendous surprise, for I had thought Mad Scientists were rather inhospitable figures - but maybe he felt lonely after all the few seconds he must have spent there, while a century passed on Earth.

Docking went smoothly, and so did the elevator ride following it, but nevertheless Excitement and Awe popped up their inquisitive heads again, as the elevator skidded to a halt, and its heavy triangular door started to glide up.

Well, I had not expected a Welcommittee, but there was something wrong about this. As a zine reporter, you have to keep your records straight, and be able to tell all the movies of the past century apart - they fed me quizzes for three weeks on end before they gave me the job - day and night.

So when I stepped out of the elevator to be greeted by Darth Vader, I knew there was something fishy about this.

"Your weapons," he wheezed, holding out a gauntleted hand.

Well, he was twice as big as me in all directions, so I handed him my lightsabre, my blaster, my phaser, my vibroblade, by bullwhip, my silver hammer, my water-pistol, my can-opener and my screwdriver.

He looking a bit overloaded, but he just stood there all the same, patiently waiting.

"Oh, very well," I said, and handed him my poisoned garter.

He nodded and turned around with a sign that I was to follow him. I did, but we had not gotten far before the next triagular door flew up to reveal an impossibly handsome man leaning against the wall. He had brown hair and hazel eyes, and he was wearing blue jeans with red pipings, and a black vest.

He was also waving a blaster around, but fortunately it was pointed not at me but at Vader.

"That's far enough, Black Jack," he said with a slight hiccup. "I'll take her from here."

To my surprise, Vader bowed and withdrew, but just as I was approaching the handsome pirate, another man showed up - or at least I supposed he had to be. He did not occupy the same space as the first one, but he might well have been his twin brother, for he had the same brown hair and the same hazel eyes - even the same scar on his chin - but he wore a blue jacket, a double-chested shirt, and his brown pants had yellow pipings.

He gave the first one a friendly shove.

"Go to bed, kid, I'll take her. An' do something about that hiccup of yours, ya been drinkin' again!"

To me, he said, "Name is Han Solo; I'm to take ya up to the bridge of this ship, to see the Captain."

He indicated the next elevator with a toss of his head. "This way, sweetheart."

I was glad he had introduced himself, for after a century of colorful films and overpainted imitations it gets kind of hard to tell all the characters apart - not that I would admit that to the eds of SH. But I was becoming increasingly curious about the Mad Scientist, so I gathered up my portable vid-recorder and followed Solo.

He kissed me twice in the elevator.

As the door flew up, we were met by a bank-robber in an ill-becoming hat and a worn bandana which slipped to reveal a scar on his chin, as he saw us. He smelled of horses something frightful, and I could not imagine how - after all, horses have been extinct for many years.

"Shee-it," he said, apparently referring to his bandana, which he hastened to replace.

"Don't be uncouth," a dark voice admonished, and a tall-good-looking man with a scar on his chin appeared in front of us. He was wearing a felt hat with a funny feather, and a short leather jacket. In one strong hand he was carrying a coiled bullwhip. I don't know why, seeing as how bulls are also extinct, ever since people learnt to synthesize milk and got rid of all the cows.

"Indiana Jones," he introduced himself, shoving the bank-robber out of the way. That sounded suspiciously like a dog's name to me, but I made no comment. He shot Solo a stern look from hazel eyes. "That'll be all, pirate," he said menacingly, and the whip uncoiled a little in his hand.

Solo made a sound like an angry snake and disappeared. Snakes are not extinct, but I did not know they were all over the galaxy.

Jones put his arm around my shoulders and took me out on to the bridge proper. It was so immense and so full of people that I had some difficulty grasping it at first - everything seemed to be going on everywhere at once. Jones stopped by a bulkhead frieze featuring various spare parts in realistic detail, outlined against vividly surreal backgrounds.

"We had the artwork brought out here from the living quarters," he said. "What do you think of them? They are priceless, you know."

To me they seemed like the last hallucinations of a starving robot.

"Well, I don't know," I said, "I think I prefer the mid-twenty-first century Neopostraphaelites."

He frowned. "They are nothing I'm familiar with."

We walked on along the seemingly never-ending bridge, and it began to dawn on me that the whole crew consisted of men - tall, lean, handsome men. Some were in uniform, some were definitely out of it; some wore glasses, some did not; some had brown hair, others almost blond; one or two even had blue eyes, as an experiment, but they all had immaculate bodies, and each one had a scar on his chin. There seemed to be hundreds of them, most of them incarnations of Solo or Jones, but there were a couple of Colonels drifting about, and in a corner I saw a police officer talking to a bellboy.

Once a bespectacled wonder in a perfectly unbelievable tie strolled by, spotted me, paused and said, "Hi, honey, I didn't see you in class today; playing hookey, were you? Doesn't pay, that kind of thing. Now I'll just have to give you a couple of private lessons, or you'll never catch up. With practical demonstrations of course; we're on to the Chicken and the Egg now - Meet you in back of the biology lab after hours, okay?"

Jones stared him down. "*You* have a teacher's conference at precisely 1600," he said. "So if you see anyone after hours today, it's likely to be me. Now beat it!"

The other shrugged his wide shoulders, winked mischievously at me from behind his glasses and moved on down the bridge. Jones glared after him.

Then I saw her. She was half reclined on a comfortable *chaise lounge*, and on a small, golden table in front of her sat a glass of some sparkling liquid. Her masses of hair were silver gray, and she was swathed in blankets which were lending her a slightly medieval look. Nevertheless, she was surrounded by men, all positively fighting amongst themselves to bestow their attentions upon her.

Jones brought me up to her table, got me a chair and a drink, and then joined the group around her.

One of the Solos bent over the seasoned lady's lips and kissed her for a solid five minutes, never breaking the contact all that while. I was on the point of leaving to find me a wet towel, when she kicked him, and he straightened with a jerk.

"Slight malfunction," she explained. "He keeps getting stuck--"

She settled herself more comfortably, and turned her full attention to me. "Your name and errand?" she inquired.

I told her.

"I was supposed to see a Mad Scientist for an interview," I explained. "Do you know where I can find him?"

She cackled forth a little laugh and shook her head. "Reinhardt hasn't been here for one hundred years, your time," she said. "I guess I'm the closest thing. What do you want to know?"

"Are you the Captain of this ship?"

"That I am," she said, "and have been ever since Reinhardt disappeared. Would *my* story do?"

"I guess it'll have to," I said, and switched on my vid-recorder.

"My name is SallyAnn Cortina," she began, "and this all started way back in 1981, when I went to see a movie called THE BLACK HOLE. Are you conversant with that film?"

Well, I would hardly have been here otherwise.

"Right," the old lady continued. "As I was sitting there in the darkened theater, watching the *Nautilus*-like home Dr. Reinhardt had built for himself, it occurred to me what a waste it all was, making so many robots for little but watch-dog purposes. A brilliant man like that could have had so much fun if he had possessed a little imagination, I felt - but instead he wasted his time putting all emphasis on *weaponry*. Can you imagine? He was living there all alone - for all practical purposes, anyway - and yet he built a positive *army* of robots, to keep him from being invaded! Well, everybody's entitled to his paranoia of course, but as I sat there seeing it all, I thought, 'Well, I sure know what *I* would have done, had I been there instead of him.'

"That is when the whole theacer went white with an Unedurable Brilliance, and a Voice Boomed from Above, 'Hey, guys, whatcha say we let her try?' And another replied, 'Awright, it cain't get no worse than it is--'

"So there I suddenly found myself on board the *Cygnus*, and Dr. Reinhardt was packing his things, telling me to beware of Maximilian, his robot foreman, whereupon he left for Earth with some visitors he was entertaining at the time.

"Well, I looked around the bridge, taking stock of the situation. Then I set to work, modifying the robots. Of course I did not know anything about such work, but the Force was with me, and we fans learn the quaintest things very fast anyway. Still, the early models were rather - atrocious. Dr. Reinhardt had not left me with much to work with.

"His zombie crew I recycled - for raw materials, you understand. Yes, it's a process somewhat similar to that employed by *le docteur* Victor Frankenstein - are you familiar with Dr. Frankenstein's work? No? Then I won't go into that - suffice it to say that these are no zombies, clones or biomats, but expertly programmed androids, whose inner workings are made up of the most immaculate machinery.

"Expertly programmed - *now*. But I had many initial difficulties. The image in which to cast them all was no problem however, since I was a devout Fordfan, and that part of things had been at the bottom of my little scheme from the start. To my immense surprise, I also succeeded quite well in giving them the characteristic lithe movements - even varying the style a little to fit each individual specifically.

"But programming! Well, Maximilian was nothing to be done about, so I turned him into Darth Vader and kept him for a watch-dog - the only one I needed, really. And the small, hillbilly model - well, presumably he was partly useful, but he *looked* like a misplaced centrifuge, so I'm afraid I chucked him.

"As for the others, the first problem was that their own programming kept shining through. All the Solos were frightfully trigger-happy and kept shooting at each other as well as at the Hallorans and Barnsbies, whenever they thought I wasn't looking. And as you can see, I'm keeping but two Kennies these days - I'm still rather unsure about that model.

"Well, in the end I mastered that little problem too, though not as well as I would have wished. Particularly Han's inclination toward violence could not be successfully disassociated from the rest of his consciousness, so I have to keep him unloaded at all times - his weapon, that is.

"Then there was the matter of the *main* program. It is in fact easier than you may think to teach an android to kiss perfectly - once the conduits for heat and moisture are in order, of course. Still, I will not pretend that I escaped difficulties altogether. Minor things, like one of the Hallorans giving nothing but cold and dry kisses, whereas the first Indy gave me blisters. His mouth happened to hold a steady seventy-five degrees centigrade, and I never really managed to figure out what was wrong.

"Still, kisses are not all that life has to offer, and I wanted these droids *perfect*. You'll never imagine how hard it can be, to construct the proper emotional response in all its complexity. All physical details, everything included - twice in one instance in fact, but that was an accident - were no match compared to that. One of the Tommies would not react if I kicked him; two of the Solos couldn't be cooled off no matter what. And they developed the oddest quirks. One of the Solos can't be kept in red light - and I always forget which one. It makes for some interesting meals, as I have red lighting in the lounge. One of the Indies keeps using his whip to ends it was never meant for, and two Tommies want me to place a silver coin on their stomachs first. I could go on, but I'd hate to bore you - I'm not boring you? Okay; see the second black-vested Solo from the left down there? Watch out for that one, he bites something fierce. The blue-jacketed one next to him is a darling, but he's afraid of heights, and he also wants you to keep a loaded blaster under your pillow, meanwhile. The one in shirt-sleeves is the loveliest of the lot, but he won't do a thing unless you attack him forcibly. The Barnsby behind them is charming too, but he'll cry when you leave him, whatever your reasons. All the Indies have ophiophobia.

"I'm afraid I let most of them keep their little oddities, since it would have taken me forever to correct them all, and anyway, I had begun to find them endearing.

"The one in swimming-trunks over there? Oh, I don't know, he's just - difficult. Drags a saw and hammer around with him all the time."

The aged lady slumped back into the arms of the Indy who had brought me; she was clearly exhausted from her long speech. I was somewhat surprised to see with what tender attention they all took care of her - even the Solos and Tommies treating her as if she were a fragile flower. For a moment I thought she would not speak again - but she did.

"I've been waiting for someone like you for a long time," she said, slowly now, as if every word, as if every word cost her tremendous effort. "You see, I am by your standards well over a century old - a little less by mine - and although these men are not programmed to see my age, it will tell on me, and I tire easily now."

Again she was quiet, then, "I've had a good life," she said - I'd be the last to contest that statement - "which is now about to end. But I need someone to care for my androids, and so, all of this" - she indicated the whole *Cygnus*, bridge, droids and all - "will be my legacy to you. You're still young; you'll last a long time."

Another pause, then, "All you have to do is keep me company for a few more days. Then, when I'm gone, help the androids to perform the last rites for me. After that, it's all yours."

I had to talk her out of this. "But I must go back to Earth!" I explained. "I've got to report to my zine, I've got to--"

"Live?" she said, an amused note to her cracking voice. "Tell me, dear, where would you find such perfect men on Earth? They *are* perfect, you know. As I am in the enviable position to guarantee. They are so perfect even, that each one has his special *im*perfection--"

Well, I admit I felt a bit speechless there, and I guess she knew she had won. She called up the shirt-sleeved Solo and one of the Indies to stand before me.

"Of course," she said, "if you'd rather I dismantled them all--"

B.M. STULTS

"N-no," I stammered.

"Good," the old lady said, almost businesslike. "Of course, I already told them all about you - the legacy, I mean. I doubt they'd *let* you leave now--"

Indy was still twining his long fingers in my hair, his hazel eyes big and bright.

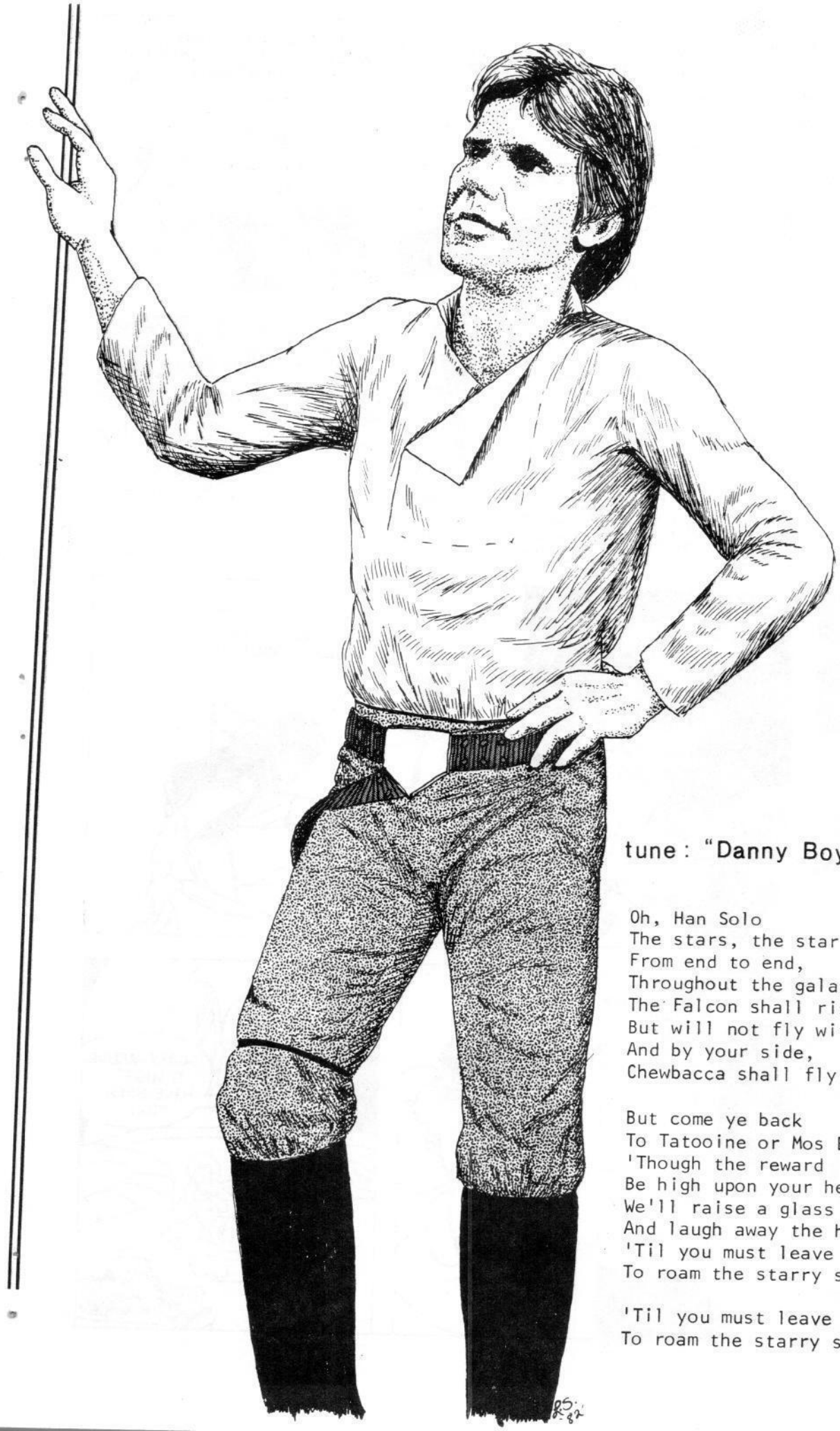
"Could you tell me what he's doing that for?" I asked, a bit nervously.

"He's a gentleman," she replied. "He prefers blondes. In front of the fireplace, mostly."

* * * *

Well, so this is my report to you, dear readers of SPACE HAPPY. I will not be able to bring it to you in person, so I am going to put it in an airtight space bottle which I will cork among the asteroidal debris. Hopefully, it will come your way in another hundred years or so.

Right now, I have some business to attend to. I seem to be developing a certain fascination with that guy in the swimming-trunks--



Han Solo

Tia Nichols

tune: "Danny Boy"

Oh, Han Solo
The stars, the stars are calling
From end to end,
Throughout the galaxies.
The Falcon shall rise,
But will not fly without you;
And by your side,
Chewbacca shall fly too.

But come ye back
To Tatooine or Mos Eisley,
'Though the reward
Be high upon your head.
We'll raise a glass
And laugh away the hours,
'Til you must leave once more
To roam the starry skies.

'Til you must leave once more
To roam the starry skies.

WINTER STALK
I'M GLAD YOU DECIDED TO ACCEPT MY INVITATION, SOLO.
Lybarger '81
I'M STILL WONDERING WHEN THE IRATE HUSBAND COMES BURSTING IN.
RELAX. NO HUSBAND, ONLY MY MAID WITH WINE.
WHY DON'T YOU DROP THAT GUNBELT SOMEWHERE, HAN?
AAGGH!
SABUREE! ONE OF JABBA 'S GOONS!
NO! NO!
WITH MORE LIKE HIM WAITING OUTSIDE, RIGHT, SWEETHEART?
SORRY, DARLING. IT MIGHT HAVE BEEN FUN.
HOPE YOU GOT PAID IN ADVANCE.
OR YOU'LL HAVE SOME TROUBLE COLLECTING FROM JABBA.

I WONDER WHERE...
HMM, NEXT QUESTION— WHERE'S THE EXIT?
STOP HIM!
UNNF!
BZZT
AIEE!
WOW! BET THAT DISSOLVED A NICE LITTLE PARTNERSHIP!
DIDN'T CATCH THAT, PAL. MIND REPEATING IT IN STANDARD?
A SHUTTLE-DRONE.
GOT TO TIME THIS JUST RIGHT.
JUST ABOUT GOING TO---
--MAKE IT!

I GUESS I LOST...
CHEWIE! FURBALL, YOU ALMOST GOT FRIED! DON'T DO THAT!
KEEP AN EYE SKINNED. JABBA'S GOT SOME MUSCLE IN PORT.
ROWRR?
YEAH, THEY TRIED FOR ME A LITTLE WHILE AGO.
...WELL, YES, BUT SHE'D DEFINITELY HAVE BEEN WORTH IT.
ARRAHH
WHARRKH!
DON'T WORRY, I'LL KEEP MY MIND ON BUSINESS.

HOW COULD I FORGET? SINCE WE LET HER HOLINESS KEEP HER CREDITS, JABBA'S BEEN AFTER US WITH EVERYTHING HE CAN BUY.
ANYWAY I'VE ARRANGED THE RENDEVOUS WITH OUR CONTACT. LET'S SEE HOW QUIETLY WE CAN BLAST OFF THIS ROCK.
AMBUSH! WHERE?
ROWR!
ARRGGH!
THUD
UMMFF
ROWR!
SO MUCH FOR INCONSPICUOUS EXITS.
DUCK!
STORMTROOPERS! HAUL IT, CHEWIE!
GET READY TO RAISE SHIP!

ALL RIGHT, YOU WANT TO STICK AROUND AND HAVE THOSE IMPERIALS ASK WHERE YOU WERE WHEN THE DEATH STAR WENT >BLOOIE<?
ARRR...
COMING UP ON BRIEL. WITH ANY LUCK, WE'LL MAKE OUR CONTACT AND PICK UP HALF OF OUR PAY. WHEN WE DELIVER THE CARGO, WE GET THE OTHER HALF—
—AND GET JABBA OFF OUR BACKS.
THIS IS THE PLACE. NOW WE WAIT FOR HIM TO FIND US.

OWREE!
YEAH, I SEE HER, PAL.
YOU ARE HAN SOLO, MASTER OF THE MILLENIUM FALCON?
IT'S POSSIBLE. DEPENDS WHY YOU WANT HIM.
I URGENTLY REQUIRE PASSAGE OUT OF HERE.
THERE ARE A LOT OF SHIPS TO CHOOSE FROM, OURS IS ALREADY CONTRACTED.
YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND! I...
ROOO
SORRY, LADY. LOOK, TRY THE DOCKING BAYS ON THE SOUTH SIDE. THEY'RE SHUTTLES AND THERE ARE ALWAYS SOME FREE FOR HIRE.
I AM- AND YOU MUST BE CAPTAIN SOLO?
YOU'RE MARIS--?
RIGHT, AND THIS IS CHEWBACCA, MY FIRST MATE.
YOU HAVE IT?

NOT HERE— OR NOW.
FELLA, IT'S CASH UP FRONT- OR WEREN'T YOU TOLD?
YES, YES, BUT THIS IS TOO PUBLIC. COME WITH ME AND I WILL TURN OVER BOTH PAY AND CARGO.
NO TRICKS! THE CARGO WAS SUPPOSED TO BE AN ART OBJECT?
A SYMBOL, CAPTAIN, A RARE OBJECT THAT IS THE RALLYING EMBLEM FOR MY PEOPLE'S RESISTENCE.
RESISTANCE?
-TO A REGIME SECRETLY BROUGHT TO POWER THROUGH THE AID OF THE EMPIRE.
ROOO
LET'S SAY WE'VE DONE BUSINESS BEFORE.
YOU ARE NOT AFRAID OF IMPERIALS?
RRRR...
YEAH, I SAW HER, CHEWIE.
LET'S WAIT AND SEE WHY SHE'S SO PERSISTENT.

DON'T TOUCH ME!
SHEATH YOUR CLAWS, SISTER. YOU DON'T LIKE HANDLING— HAVE IT YOUR WAY.
—BUT I DON'T LIKE OTHER NOSES IN MY BUSINESS. WHY WERE YOU FOLLOWING US?
I TOLD YOU AT THE BAR, I NEEDED A WAY OFF-PLANET WITH SOMEONE WHO COULD HANDLE CONTRABAND AND TROUBLE.
MEANING YOU?
I HAD TO DEAL WITHA STORMTROOPER WHO CAME TO ARREST ME.
YOU TOOK OUT A STORMTROOPER!? GET OUT OF HERE! YOU'LL COMPROMISE EVERYTHING!

IF I'M CAUGHT, THE IMPERIALS MIGHT BE INTERESTED IN HAN SOLO TOO!
...WHY WOULD THEY?
I'VE MADE INQUIRIES-SMUGGLER! THE DEATH STAR WAS RECENTLY DESTROYED...
DON'T
ALL RIGHT- COME ON!
I KNOW- DON'T TOUCH.
NO!
BUT I'M NOT LETTING YOU OUT OF MY SIGHT, LADY—
FELLA, LIKE YOU SAID- WE'RE A LITTLE TOO PUBLIC - MOVE!

NOW WE'RE PRIVATE - SO SPILL IT.
VERY WELL, CAPTAIN.
THIS PACKAGE CONTAINS THE FIRST HALF OF YOUR PAY.
FIRE CRYSTALS - AS YOU SPECIFIED THEY ARE SATISFACTORY?
VERY - AND THE CARGO?
THERE, CAPTAIN -
- TO BE DELIVERED TO A MAN NAMED VONCEL AT THE CUSTOMS STATION ON OUR FOURTH MOON.
THAT'S A SWITCH! A SMUGGLER REPORTING TO A CUSTOMS AGENT!
GENTLY!
RIGHT! WHEW! TAKE THE OTHER END, CHEWIE.
IT IS VERY FRAGILE, VERY IMPORTANT.

THAT'S THE MILLENIUM FALCON?
DON'T KNOCK THE TRANSPORTATION, LADY.
YOU WORKED FOR IT.
SAY, WHAT IS YOUR NAME?
SHEEN.
WHAT'S UP?
GROWOWR!
A WINTERSTALK? WHAT'S THAT?
OH, GREAT!
A HUNT, CAPTAIN SOLO—FOR MY BROTHER'S KILLER. THERE IS A PRESCRIBED RITUAL FOR SUCH A HUNT AMONG MY RACE.
WELL, YOU'LL HAVE TO START ON BRIEL'S FOURTH MOON— NO DETOURS!
HEY! DON'T START BLASTING TIL CHEWIE AND I ARE CLEAR!
NO PROBLEM, HE WILL BE THERE.
I CAN DO NOTHING UNTIL THE TIME IS PROPER.
WE ARE A WARLIKE RACE, CAPTAIN. THE WINTERSTALK WAS MADE DIFFICULT AND SOLEMN TO KEEP US FROM WIPING EACH OTHER OUT.

THUMP
SOUNDS JOLLY, I... HEY! WHAT?...
WHAT THE...?
CAREFUL
OK, CHEWIE OPEN IT!
I THINK I'VE BEEN HAD!
WHO ARE YOU, KID?
YEAH, MAYBE HE CAN'T TALK, CHEWIE.
ARRGH—!
YOU MIGHT FEED HIM!
OK, BREAK OUT A MEAL PACK.
HE FEARS ME, CAPTAIN.

TAKE IT EASY SMALL STUFF. NO ONE'S GOING –
– TO HURT YOU!
TRY HIM ON SOME OF THAT BROTH CONCENTRATE, CHEWIE.
I DON'T SUPPOSE YOU CAN TELL US HOW YOU GOT HERE.
I KNEW THIS THING WAS HELD TOGETHER BY OPTIMISM!
BZZZT
BZZT
SHEEN, I DIDN'T KNOW THERE WERE TWO FEMALES IN THIS GALAXY WITH THE SAME KIND OF MOUTH!

HOLD IT, SHORTSTUFF! I TOLD YOU TO STAY OUT OF THERE.
-ZZZT
YOU COULD HAVE LOST A HAND!
DON'T CRY ABOUT IT-JUST DON'T DO IT AGAIN. TRY THIS FOR AWHILE.
SHEEN, JUST WATCH HIM UNTIL WE GET FINISHED, WILL YOU?
KIDS! SUDDENLY, I'M RUNNING A NURSERY!
HIS EAR! CAPTAIN! I KNOW WHO THIS BOY IS!
HE HAS A JADITE PLUG IN HIS RIGHT EARLOBE- HE'S A MEMBER OF THE ROYAL FAMILY!
BUT THEY WERE ALL KILLED! A WILD NARDA BEAR ATTACK OR SOMETHING-EVEN THE SERVANTS AND GUARDS
-AND THE NEW REGIME CAME IMMEDIATELY TO POWER-AND CONSOLIDATED THE EMPIRE'S OPEN CONTROL.
OK, I GET IT. A ROYAL GOVERNMENT WITH A LOT OF POPULAR SUPPORT-AND NOT SYMPATHETIC TO THE EMPIRE. BUT THEY MISSED ONE.-WHICH?
JANNA, I THINK.
HE WAS THERE?
YES.
NO WONDER HE ISN'T TALKING!

SO HE'S THE SYMBOL OF RESISTENCE WE DELIVER TO THE UNDERGROUND.
YOU SPANKED A CROWN PRINCE!
IT'S NOT THE ONLY ROYAL SEAT THAT COULD BE IMPROVED BY IT.
WE'RE COMING OUT OF HYPER-SPACE.
JUST PROTECTING THE INVESTMENT
OF A CERTAINTY, CAPTAIN.

WE'RE SAFE ENOUGH LANDING IN THE FOREST WHILE I GO INTO THE CITY TO FIND OUR CONTACT. KEEP AN EYE ON THE FALCON, CHEWIE.
I'LL BE BACK IN A COUPLE OF STANDARDS.
THIS IS THE END OF THE LINE, SHEEN. WANT TO COME ALONG?
I'LL WAIT A BIT, CAPTAIN.
SUIT YOURSELF.
WHAAROO!
YES, I KNOW HE'S LATE. WHY ARE YOU WORRIED; HE WOULDN'T BE IF IT WERE YOU?
BRAAK
WOOKIES ARE HONORABLE. HOW DID YOU EVER COME TO PARTNER A MERCENARY— A SMUGGLER?
ARROOO
HA! OF COURSE NO ONE EVER STARTS THAT WAY! MY BROTHER DIDN'T.
—BUT HE BECAME GREEDY, VISCIOUS, LEFT TRIBAL WAYS, BECAME A SKULKING KILLER FOR HIRE.
NOW HE'S DEAD—MY LITTERMATE! AND I AM BOUND TO AVENGE HIM. OH, SABURRE!

IT'S ALL SET. WHERE'S JANNA?
GOOD THING WE GET THE FALCON DOWN OUTSIDE THE PORT—STORMTROOPERS LIKE A BLIZZARD ON HOTH.
WHAT ABOUT YOU, SHEEN? YOU'VE GOT SOME "IMPERIAL ENTANGLEMENTS."
I WILL MANAGE. I'LL GO AS YOU GO.
CHEWIE, GET JANNA. WE HAVE TO GET MOVING.
YOU DROPPED SOMETHING, SHEEN.

I'LL TAKE THAT, CAPTAIN!
WHEW! SMELLS LIKE A PRESERVING JAR!
CHEMICAL CRYSTALS IN THE LINING—AND FOR THE SAME PURPOSE.
THIS IS A VENDETTA POUCH, CAPTAIN. IT IS GIVEN TO BOTH SEXES AT CEREMONIES MARKING PUBERTY.
A CUB IS CONSIDERED OLD ENOUGH THEN TO TAKE RESPONSIBILITY FOR SAFE-GUARDING—AND AVENGING CLAN HONOR.
AND THE PRESERVATIVE?
IT IS FOR THE HEARTS OF ENEMIES.
AS SHORT-TEMPERED AS YOU FOLKS ARE, IT MUST GET PRETTY HEAVY.
IT IS FOR FORMAL VENDETTAS—ONE ENEMY—ONE HEART. THE HEART TO BE TAKEN HOME TO BE BURNED ON THE CLAN HEARTH.
HMM... AND THEN SERVED WITH OR WITHOUT SAUCE?
DON'T JOKE! IT IS A SOLEMN THING! THE ASHES ARE SCATTERED ON THE GRAVE OF THE WRONGED CLAN MEMBER.
AND YOUR BAG IS EMPTY?
INDEED, YES, CAPTAIN SOLO.

WHARRRGGGH
I DON'T LIKE WALKING IN THERE EITHER, BUT VONCEL'S A MINOR OFFICIAL—SORT OF BELOW SUSPICION.
HIDE IN PLAIN SIGHT, MAKES SENSE—I GUESS!
SHEEN, YOU DON'T NEED TO GO IN. WE'RE QUITS AFTER ALL, AND YOU'VE GOT BUSINESS OF YOUR OWN.
I WAS ON BRIEL LONG ENOUGH TO KNOW SOMETHING OF ALL THIS. PERHAPS I HAVE AN INTEREST IN A SMALL CHILD LEFT TO YOUR TENDER CARE.
AND MY QUARRY WILL NOT LEAVE WITHOUT MY KNOWLEDGE.
IT'S YOUR PELT, LADY.
VONCEL?
YES? CAN I HELP YOU?
I BELIEVE I WAS SUPPOSED TO DELIVER YOUR "NEPHEW" HERE.
THE LITTLE ONE! YOU HAVE HIM SAFE? —EXCELLENT!
YOU HAVE SOMETHING OF YOUR OWN TO DELIVER, VONCEL?
AH! OF COURSE. SHALL WE STEP INTO MY OFFICE?
WATCH BY THE DOOR, CHEWIE.
THIS SMELLS LIKE A SET UP BUT DO WE REALLY HAVE A CHOICE?

NOW THEN...
I HAVE HIM! CAPTURE THE REBELS NOW!
DAMN! I KNEW IT! WATCH YOUR LEFT, CHEWIE!
TCHOW
NO! GET AWAY!
GROWRR
DOWN, CHEWIE!
ANYWAY, ONE LESS WHO KNOWS THE KID ON SIGHT.
ARRGH
CHEWIE!
NO!
YOU CAN'T HELP HIM BY BEING CAUGHT, TOO!

HAN, THINK FIRST FOR ONCE! SAVE HIM LATER WHEN THERE'S A BETTER CHANCE
TCHOW
AND WHAT OF JANNA? YOU WERE PAID. YOU OWE HIM SAFETY—
OR ARE ALL YOU FREEBOOTERS ALIKE?
RUN FOR THE FILE ROOM!
TCHOW
TCHOW
TCHOW
TCHOW
THAT'LL SLOW THEM DOWN FOR A MINUTE OR TWO
SHEEN, CLIMB OUT. I'LL HAND THE KID DOWN TO YOU!
CRASH!

CRASH!
I HAVE HIM!
MMMF
ALL RIGHT, THEY'VE GONE.
AAANNH!
KID, LISTEN. THAT WASN'T YOUR FAMILY. IT WASN'T HAPPENING ALL OVER AGAIN. THIS TIME, IT WAS THE BAD GUYS - THE ONES WHO HURT YOUR FAMILY.

NOW BLOW.
ALL RIGHT, YOU CAN HITCH A RIDE. IT HAS BEEN A LONG DAY.
AND JUST WHAT WILL YOU DO WITH HIM, HAN? KEEP HIM FOR AN APPRENTICE SMUGGLER?—YOU'RE NO FATHER FIGURE.
WHAT DO YOU SUGGEST? BESIDES, I THOUGHT YOU HAD A VENDETTA TO GET ON WITH. I NOT EXACTLY A MOTHER TYPE, EITHER.
DON'T SHOOT! WE'RE FRIENDS.
I SEEM HIP DEEP IN THEM. WHY SHOULD I TRUST YOU?
BECAUSE YOU MUST.
HELL! TWO IN ONE DAY! I MUST BE GETTING SENILE!

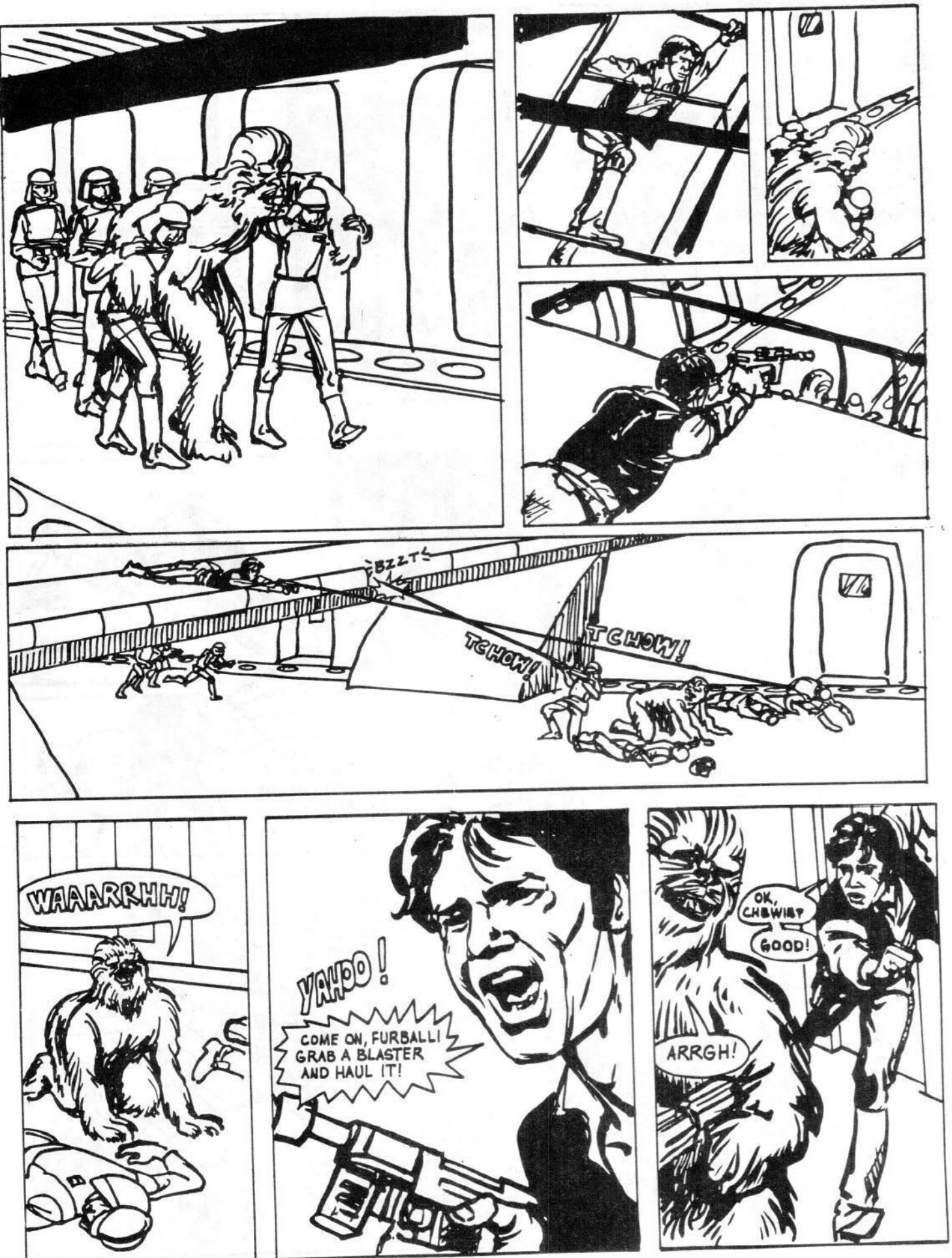
WE REALLY ARE THE UNDERGROUND, CAPTAIN, AND YOU ARE ALL SAFE WITH US.
WE KNEW VONCEL HAD TURNED TRAITOR BUT DID NOT KNOW WHO HIS CONTACT WAS, SO WE COULD NOT WARN YOU.
WE'LL TAKE JANNA.
HE WILL LEAD US TO VICTORY!
OVER THE EMPIRE? YOU'RE AS BAD AS PRINCESS LEIA AND HER REBEL ARMY.
ANYWAY, HE'S A LITTLE YOUNG TO BE PLAYING ON BARRICADES DON'T YOU THINK?
WHAT IS THAT TO A MERCENARY LIKE YOU? - YOU'VE BEEN PAID...
HALF-PAID, CHUM, AND SINCE YOU BROUGHT THE SUBJECT UP, I FIGURE SOMEBODY STILL OWES
WOULD YOU KEEP THE LAD? HE WILL ONLY HINDER YOUR ESCAPE.
ESCAPE! I'VE GOT A PARTNER TO PRY OUT OF THE IMPERIALS!
YOU CAN'T BE SERIOUS - HE HAS ALREADY BEEN TAKEN TO DETENTION.

YOU KNOW WHERE HE IS?
THE FALCON IS HIDDEN IN THAT AREA.
INDEED, WE HAVE A MAN INSIDE THE IMPERIAL COMPOUND. IT'S ISOLATED IN THE FOREST, A KILOMETER OUTSIDE THE WEST SECTOR OF THE CITY
NO! WE CAN'T RISK COMPROMISING HIS IDENTITY!
I NEED HIS HELP TO GET IN AND OUT!
BUDDY I'M GETTING PRETTY TIRED OF YOU GUYS TELLING ME ALL THE THINGS I CAN'T DO.
YOU CAN'T SHOOT ME! ANYONE HERE WOULD KILL YOU INSTANTLY!
IF I CAN'T GET CHEWIE OUT, IT WOULDN'T MATTER. -AND YOU'D HIT THE FLOOR BEFORE I DID.
REMEMBER, YOU STILL OWE ME.
ALL RIGHT. AGREED. I'LL ARRANGE IT.
AND NOW, JANNA...
WHAT ARE YOU PLANNING TO DO -FLY HIM FROM A STANDARD?
NOTHING SO WASTEFUL, CAPTAIN.

HE WILL BE RAISED BY A CHILDLESS COUPLE ON AN ISOLATED FARM WHERE HE WILL HAVE TIME TO HEAL AND TO LEARN.
WATCHED OVER BY ME.
AND WHEN THE TIMES ARE READY, HE WILL BE THERE FOR HIS PEOPLE.
ARE YOU A JEDI?
NO, CAPTAIN, BUT I KNOW WHO YOU ARE REMINDED OF. -I AM HONORED.
COME, LITTLE JANNA.
HEY-EASY, SHORT STUFF! YOU'LL BE FINE.
NO MORE SHOOTING-PROMISE.
YOU KNOW, I KNOW ANOTHER ORPHAN WHO DIDN'T TURN OUT SO BAD AT THAT.
WHY DOES ALL THIS SEEM LIKE I'VE HEARD IT BEFORE?
LATER
WELL, I GUESS IT'S GOODBYE, SHEEN. GOOD LUCK.
YES, OUR BARGAIN IS KEPT.

ALL I CAN DO IS GET YOU IN. THEN YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN.
YOU'RE CRAZY TO TRY THIS.
INSPIRATION'S MY SPECIALTY.
BESIDES-DID YOU THINK I'D LEAVE MY PARTNER?
I WOULD, IF IT JEOPARDIZED THE CAUSE.
YOUR LOYALTIES ARE TOO INDIVIDUAL.
KEEPS THINGS SIMPLE, PAL.
AND THEY FIGURE ME FOR A HARD CASE?
HERE'S THE AIR SHAFT. NOW, I'VE GOT TO LEAVE.
YOU BETTER BE A LONG WAY FROM HERE.
I WILL BE. GOOD LUCK.
I SHOULD BE JUST UNDER DETENTION LEVEL ACCORDING TO THE BLUE PRINTS.

HE SAID CHEWIE WAS IN THE THIRD TIER...
DAMN! CHEWIE'S NOT IN HIS CELL!
WHAT HAVE THEY DONE WITH HIM?
TALK FAST. THE WOOKIE CAPTURED THIS MORNING, WHERE IS HE?
I'M NOT TALKING!
HOW WOULD YOU LIKE ME TO HEAT UP YOUR HELMET?
HE'S AT INTERROGATION - SHOULD BE COMING BACK ANY MINUTE.
AT LEAST I WON'T HAVE TO TACKLE THE MAIN CONSOLE TO PROGRAM THE CELL TO OPEN.
THANKS A LOT.


BZZT
TCHOW!
TCHOW!
WAAARRHH!
YAHOO!
COME ON, FURBALL! GRAB A BLASTER AND HAUL IT!
OK, CHEWIE!
GOOD!
ARRGH!

HAAWO
I WAS AFRAID OF THAT! -TOO SMALL!
WE'LL HAVE TO GET OUT THE HARD WAY.
BACK TO THE CONSOLE.
CHEWIE! OPEN ALL THE CELLS AND OVERRIDE THE FREIGHT TUBE CONTROLS!
FREIGHT TUBE! HURRY!
THE OVERRIDE WILL KEEP THE FIELD ON, BUT THE GUARDS WILL GET TO THAT CONSOLE ANY MINUTE.

MAIN ENTRANCE AND OFFICES
COVER ME, CHEWIE! I'VE GOT TO PUT OUT THE POWER STATION OR THEIR SURVEILLANCE GEAR WILL TRACK US IN NO TIME.
AARGH!
WHAA...
:BZZZT:
SHEEN! WHAT ARE YOU DOING HERE?
AFTER WE PARTED, I WAS CAPTURED. THE CONSOLE OPENED MY CELL, TOO.
AS HE SHOULD BELIEVE.
I HAD THE SAME THOUGHT -THE POWER STATION.
SHEEN! LOOK OUT!
HAN-WHAT?
:UMMF:
TCHOW
:UNNOH:

THANK YOU, HAN.
TCHOW!
GUNNH! JUST RETURNING THE FAVOR, SHEEN.
A DISRUPTOR! JUST THE THING!
TAKE OFF WITH CHEWIE, SHEEN. I'LL BE RIGHT BEHIND YOU AFTER I SET THIS ON OVERLOAD.
WHY AREN'T I BEATING FEET? SPACE DUST BETWEEN THE EARS. LEIA WOULD LAUGH HERSELF SICK.
ONLY DRAWBACK TO USING THIS THING LIKE A BOMB—
—IS NO TIMER FUZE—BULLSEYE!
NOW I'VE ONLY GOT TIL THE OVERLOAD BLOWS AND SETS OFF THE REACTION.
NOW LET'S SEE IF I CAN SET SOME SPEED RECORDS WITHOUT THE FALCON.

BAKOOM!
WHOOM!
GRRRRR!
NO, HE DIDN'T CATCH UP WITH US, CHEWBACCA.
WARRGH!
YES, OF COURSE YOU MUST DOUBLE BACK. I'LL GO WITH YOU.
YIPES! CHEWIE'S RIGHT. CAREFUL PLANNING IS DEFINITELY NOT IN MY LINE.
AT LEAST THE "WHITE HATS" WILL BE TOO BUSY TO LOOK FOR MY PRISONERS TONIGHT.
GOOD THING THAT 'TEC'S' BLASTER WAS ON LOW CHARGE OR THAT BOLT WOULD HAVE STEAMED CLEAN THROUGH.
JUST GREAT. I'VE ONLY GOT A HOLE HALFWAY THROUGH MY CHEST.
NO GOOD... HAVE T-TO WAIT TIL THE FOREST STOPS TURNING.
H-HOPE... CHEWIE AND... SHEEN... M-MADE... IT...

GROWR
YES, WITH NO PURSUIT, THE MOONLIGHT WILL BE A HELP.
AT LAST, I AM PERMITTED THE SEASON OF STALKING... SO LATE...
OH! A BLOODMOON!
I'LL LOOK THIS WAY, CHEWBACCA. YOU TRY THAT WAY AND WORK BACK.
ARROO!
I'M SORRY, CHEWBACCA...
BUT I HAVE A PROMISE TO KEEP.

NO! OH, FRIEND HAN, I HAVE LEARNED THAT THE EXCHANGE WOULD BE TOO UNEQUAL IF I TOOK YOUR LIFE FOR MY WORTHLESS BROTHER.

HOW MUCH SIMPLER, IF YOU'D BEEN ANOTHER LIKE HIM... OR IF I'D NEVER BOTHERED TO KNOW YOU...
BUT NO, I AM GLAD TO CALL YOU FRIEND... MY DEAR, DEAR FRIEND/ ENEMY—
UNNH!---
SH--SHEEN?... WHAT...?
IT'S ALL RIGHT. CHEWBACCA WILL RETURN. SHORTLY EVERYTHING IS FINISHED.
GOODBYE, HAN.
WHY, SHEEN?
BECAUSE YOUR HEART WAS THE ONE FORFEIT... AND I COULD NOT TAKE IT.
NO! - NOT WITH THE BLADE I DISHONORED!
SHEEN! DON'T DO IT!
SHEEN!

SHEEN! DON'T!
WHY, SHEEN?

AND WHY DIDN'T SHE KILL ME?
OWOOOO.
DOWN HERE, OLD BUDDY.
GET SOME ROPE, CHEWIE.
ARRGH!
STOP FUSSING, WORRYWORT. WE'LL GO SOON.
AFTER WE COVER SHEEN.
WARROO..
YEAH, YOU'RE RIGHT. TEN MORE STONES WON'T BRING HER BACK.
GARSH!
WHERE? THE REBELS? BUT...
OH, HELL, YOU'RE DRIVING THE BUS.
ARRR!
UNGH! TAKE IT EASY, CHEWIE. OK, OK, WE'LL GO.
HAROOO
YEAH, CHEWIE, SOMETIMES IT'S NOT A GAME AT ALL.
END

WHERE IN ALL CREATION

Where in creation could you ever discover
Such a great combination, such a magnificent man?
Quite an equation, a super-fine lover,
Making a sensation any way that he can!
Full of surprises and sometimes disguises,
That dude will thrill you right down to your bones.
No one can take you, do you in or break you --
Lord! I'd love to make you, Dr. Indiana Jones!

Out of the classroom and right into action --
Wow! It's just one fast 'zoom' 'cause danger is his thing.
Indy just spells mass doom for the Nazi faction,
But did he leave his ass room to stay out of the sling?
Indy, gotta laud you, stand up and applaud you,
Takin' out the bad guys all alone.
No one can trust you, keep you down or bust you --
Dr. Jones, it's just you, you do it all alone.

When he is after treasure, he's always in a gunfight
Never takes no leisure, just racking up the miles.
No time out for pleasure -- well, maybe just for one night.
Indiana,bless your heart! Marion's all smiles.
Got to hand it to you, Indy, always knew you'd
Have to lose a lot to have a lack!
Ten years ain't changed you, just maybe rearranged you.
The mileage it just trained you, she's glad to have you back.

You got my attention, can't take my eyes off you
Just the merest mention of your name gets me high.
Skirmishin' and wenchin', Lordy, how I love you
In bondage and detention, you make me wanna die!
Doctor, I assure you, I'd love to lure you
Off to someplace quiet out of town!
But damn! Your motivation puts me in desperation!
Where in all creation could I get you to slow down!

MARTIE BENEDICT

JR Dunster '81

THEN I'LL SEE YOU IN HELL

The exiled Florentine knew
For all the smoke and blaze of upper hell
The deep abyss burns still and white.

A man fell down the snowdrifted cosmos,
Cirrus breath, crystalled clothes,
Frosted hair, icecrusted skin
Then night.
An I becomes an it,
A man a stone
Unless one comes running
(To warm the alone)
Bearing the Spring

Han saved another.
Himself he cannot save.

GRACIA FAY ELLWOOD

Beginnings

Roberta Stuemke

illustrated by Becky Aulenbach

The universe had contracted down into one small cell. Since Corellia was not given to ostentation in anything, it was a small, barely lit, poorly ventilated cell. There was just enoug light for its sole occupant to see the vial left on the meal tray. By custom, the guard that night was one of the prisoner's Academy classmates; by law, that guard had left a vial of fast-acting poison, "should the prisoner choose to end his life bravely and in honor, to spare his compatriots the distressing sight of his punishment." Until the words echoed back to him, H'an didn't realized he had quoted the presiding judge out loud.

He figured he had only a brief time left in which to decide -- an 'honorable' death or a dishonored, outcast life. All this for a crim of which he was not guilty. "To spare my compatriots. Great choice of words, General. Just don't call them friends. Hey, you, oath-partners, where was my defence? Not one word, huh? My friends! I was willling to risk my neck for you, even saved a few asses from time to time, but do I get any help back? Not from you guys. Just from that big old Wookiee, and I didn't do that much for him. No spacer ignores a distress code, and as rescues go, that wasn an easy one, but he testified for me and you didn't All those great careers to protect; yeah, I understand. Well, you great honorable fools, Briga is still the CO; he'll toss any one of you into this prison just as fast as he did me. It's called advancing your career."

The liquid in the vial was blue, bright blue. Blue as Marantha's eyes. Beautiful Marantha, loving Marantha -- turncoat Marantha, the first to condemn him publicly. "I must think of my future, and my family's, Halvian. I can't be tainted by association, or I'll have to suffer with you." Haughty as ever, still calm, still refusing to use the nickname that she claimed belonged only in the barracks, she certainly hadn't looked like she was suffering.

"Hey, lady, don't the old bards say love is suffering? What happened to that poetic soul you were so proud of, lover? Just be sure to return the betrothal gift, sweetheart, since you never earned it." The soliloquey's echo made the cell seem not quite so empty and barren.

"What about you, old man? Stood so proud to see your first son take his oath of commission. Say, did you even recognize me? Threw me into that academy so young, I bet you had to wait until I was announced before you could tell which uniform fit me. What choice would want me to make, Father? Or does it really matter, considering you've already announced my 'public' death, disinheriting me, disowning me, dis-everything. I didn't hear any protest from you at all; I suppose that's harder than bragging about a hero son you don't even know. Do you really think I could do what Briga said I did? Do you care if I really did it? Yeah, threw me into that academy so long ago, you don't know me at all. Even the Wookiee knew me better.

"Gods, what have they told Halvidor? Anything? They don't like to publish these things, but Father had to tell him something. Hey, kid, don't believe it, kid. Damn you, old man, why couldn't you let me see him just once? That's my kid brother, bet you he doesn't think I could do this. Why couldn't you have let me see him, just long enough to tell him what really happened?"

Blue poison. One quick swallow and nothing would matter anymore. No more betrayal, no more hurt, no more nothing. "The hell with that; I'm not gonna fall over and die on command, Briga. By that great hairy Wookiee that testified for me, I'm going to live, if only to make you sweat, knowing I'm still alive out there, could still expose you for the lying, thieving coward you are. I'll make everybody uneasy, violating that damn code. Well, I won't die for a code that would comdemn me without defense for something I didn't do. No, dying's the easy way out, the coward's way out, and I ain't no coward. You hear that, Briga? I ain't a coward!"

It wasn't too long before Jacoric, his guard and ex-wing man, came to get him. The door slid open to reveal the empty meal tray, and a prisoner sprawled out on the floor. Jacoric sighed in relief. No dishonored class, no I-only-flew-with-him-I-wasn't-his-confidant, no drumming-out ceremony before all the witnesses and the class and the local politicians. The sigh turned to an angry gasp as the 'dead' prisoner yawned, stretched and rose lazily, brushing off his uniform trousers. "Hey, what's this buddy, no breakfast? I call that cheating, friend. Time already, huh? Well, let's go, don't want to keep Briga and the general in suspense, do we?"

H'an moved past the stunned guard and out into the prison corridor. J'ric snapped about and grabbed his arm. "Couldn't you even die like a man? Couldn't you do one last thing right?"

H'an looked down at his former friend. "I did, Jacoric, I did. Oh, by the way, is this yours? You left it in the cell last night." He tossed the little blue vial to the other man. It fell to the floor and broke,

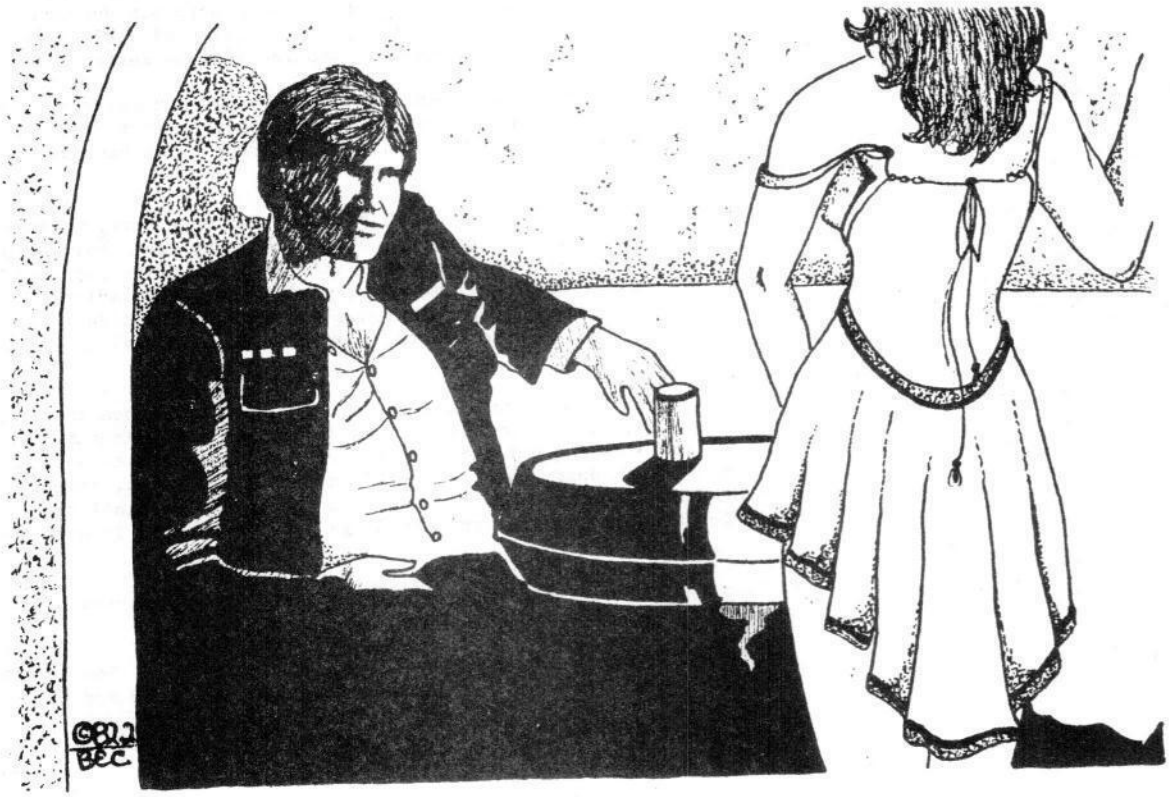
leaving a shimmering pool on the dark metal. The two men moved to the courtyard door, the one tense and angry, the other as casual as pride and hurt would allow him to be. He even managed a convincingly unconcerned slouch. Only if someone looked into his eyes would they know how concerned he was.

They pased as they came to the arch into the courtyard, and a collective gasp stirred the waiting crowd. H'an's restless eyes earched over the spectators. There was the entire class, of course, standing as required in nice straight regulations filves, the junior officers' epaulets turned backward already as in mourning. Over in the far corner was his father, obviously undecided between an angry look or a sorrowful one, not sure which would be better for business. At least he hadn't brought the boy; there might still be a chance to persuade his brother that he was innocent. Marantha was there, dressed in mourning, standing next to Briga. Briga? Beautiful -- Marantha and Briga. Nightmare material. Wait now, who was that over in the shadows of the public entrance? Gods, the Wookiee! The one witness in his favor, whom no one had listened to. (Who could trust a Wookiee, anyway?)

H'an could see the shock rippling through the crowd. He wondered when was the las time someone in his position hadn't chose the beautiful blue vial. Certainly not in his lifetime, so everyone had expected him to die. The amusement in the thought that he had fooled them all was what kept his head up for the long walk to the 'execution wall' and brought a shadow of his old grin that lasted throughout the ceremony. It even enabled him to keep his face straight for the brief walk, minus all rank and insignia, across the yard to the exit, where he stopped abruptly, came to attention, pivoted briskly and snapped a bow and a salute to Briga, who paled considerably at the motion, before disappearing around the wall. In the frozen silence, no one noticed that the Wookiee had followed him out. Most of them had ignored the Wookiee anyway.

Several days later, H'an was in Varianasa, a port city on the other side of the planet. He was scruffy, unshaven, still wearing the uniform trousers, but in civilian boots, shirt and spacer's jacket. He even had some money from the sale of the betrothal gift he'd stolen back from Marantha, and the savings from his military pay, always faithfully sent home to his father to hold. He had removed that from the family vault without a word. Halvidor had been sent from the city to 'protect' him; their father had decided to enter the boy in the merchant guild school, since H'an's misfortune would haunt him if Halvidor went to the service academy. So Halvian never had a chance to explain to the only person he still trusted; he knew the merchants would never let him see his brother in the school. Apparently his disarray had been a sufficient disguise; so far, no one in Varianasa had openly recognized him. Of course, the academy had hushed everything up as much as possible -- such a disgrace was bad publicity for the services.

He was sitting in a back booth in a lowdown alley dive, brooding over his drink, when he noticed the Wookiee. Peering rather uneasily through the smoky haze, he couldn't tell if it was the same one, the witness, or not. Could the creature be following him? Whatever for? Why would he even be interested? On the other hand, the giant furry alien had been interested enough to come to the drumming-out ceremony. Now just what had the court interpreter said the thing's name was? Yeah, that was it -- Chewbacca.



A shadow with interesting curves interrupted his reverie. "Hello there, friend. Need some company?" He looked up lazily, feeling his last drink. The woman was probably only half Corellian, but she was possessed of a rather coarse beauty.

"Why not, if it don't cost too much," he drawled, slurring his Basic a bit. The whore slid down to snuggle against his shoulder; she smelled of strong drink, cheap perfume, and her smile was the artificial mark of her trade. Across the room the Wookiee shook his head and showed his teeth. Halvian ignored him. It probably wasn't the same Wookiee anyway, who could tell? A few drinks later, he followed her out of the cantina, headed, he assumed, for her rooms.

Then there were some new shadows, one with a club aimed for his head. Enough of the trained spacer's reflexes surfaced through the half-drunken haze for him to ward off the blow and protect himself from the next few attempts, but three burly sober men intent on robbery were more than a match for one half-drunken depressed youth. The whore sat down on the pavement and began to giggle.

H'an was beginning to blur around the edges. He barely heard that inane giggle turn to a shoking shriek as he faded to the ground. He was unconcious before the Wookiee let out his fighting bellow.

H'an woke up, head throbbing and various other aches reporting themselves all over his body, in a cheap hostel room. Apparently the Wookiee hadn't been quick enough to save the money -- his pockets were empty. His huge furry rescuer loomed over the lumpy bunk, gigantic paws moving over the bruises with incredible gentleness, blue eyes obviously concerned. The creature grunted a little; H'an shook his head, both to clear the fuzziness and to indicate that he couldn't understand Wookiee-gab. The Wookiee gave a soft reply and helped him sit up, reaching for a meal tray and shoving it hopefully in H'an's direction.

It took a few hours for H'an's head to clear completely, and for his body to obey his commands without failure. During those hours the Wookiee waited patiently, barking some brief Wookiee reply whenever H'an said anything, and handing him such things as cleaning towels for the cuts and another shirt to replace the torn one. "Now where did you get that, Chewbacca?" H'an used the name frequently, trying to indicate that he considered the Wookiee a friend. Every time he said it, the creature gave what Han considered to be a laugh. It was such an awkward name, but none of the obvious Corellian nickname rules worked with it. Finally it got shortened to Chewie. The Wookiee didn't seen to mind so Chewie it was. H'an was even geginning to recognize differences in the various barks and grunts of Wookiee-gab, and was sure he knew the one that meant food. Maybe it wasn't such an incomprehensible language after all.

H'an also had time in those hours to consider his future, a consideration he'd not devoted much time to as yet, ½referring to wait until his money ran out and then see what happened. Well, his money was gone, and a lot faster than he'd figured. "Gods, to be taken by a common spaceport whore. I must've been a whole lot drunker than I thought to let her get by me." The Wookiee laughed. "Yeah, that's right, Chewie, laugh. It's about the funniest thing that's happened to me lately. Hey, you furry oaf, you got any money?" Chewbacca barked once and shook his head. "I guess that one means no, huh?

"And I can't get any, you know that. At least, I sure can't use my name. They may not know my face in this city, but my name must be familiar. Besides, the old man threw me out. I can't use his name, wouldn't be honorable." Chewie snorted. "Well, sure, gotta be honorable, didn't you know that? All well-born Corellians got to have honor. Like Briga. Well, guess I just have to use another name. Something new and old at the same time. "

H'an lay falt on the floor, trying to relax his back muscles. "First name's easy, just drop the full name and use the nickname, without the indicative. Han. That's simple enough. But the other one can't sound like a family name; don't want another family name. I've had enough of family for awhile. Halvidor can't be hurt by anymore of my activities if I don't use his name. Let's see, I'm using a nickname for the one, how about another nickname for the other? Back in flight school my instructors kept saying I was too independant, too much the solo artist. So the guys took to calling me Solo; I guess that pretty much describes the situation. Han Solo. What do you think, Chewbacca? That sound right to you? I hope that means yes, buddy, 'cause that's what the name's gonna be."

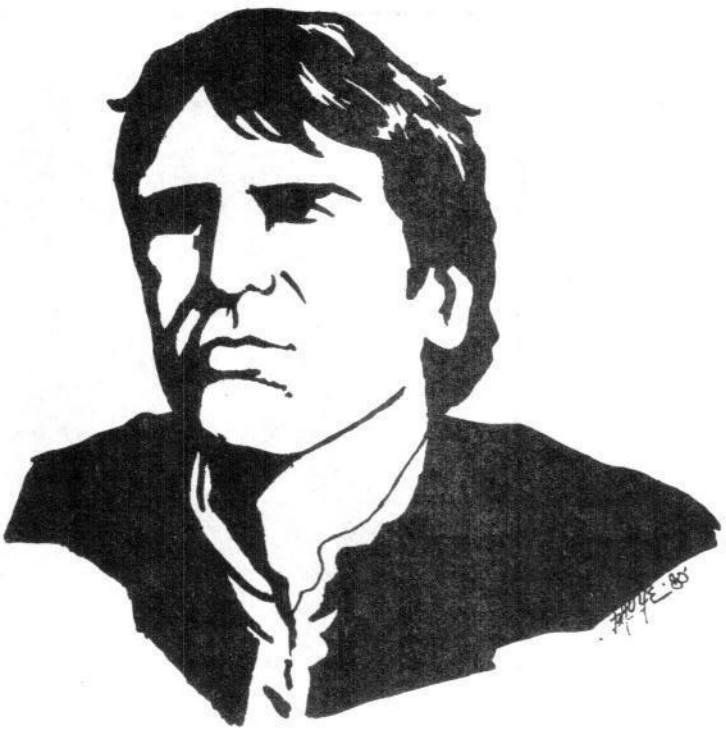
Chewie had enough spare cash on him to pay for one more meal, and then they had nothing. The room was paid for only until midday, so they had no shelter either. It was while they were eating that Han spotted the whore again. His eyes flashed dangerously and he started to rise. Chewie reached for him and pushed him back down again, grunting and wheezing angrily. "Guess you're right, bad idea here in the open. But that creature has my money. We need that money. You got any ideas how we're going to get it back without getting jailed for it?"

The Wookiee growled deep in his throat; Han realized the sound was a chuckle. He looked puzzled, and Chewie half-turned toward the whore. She was just in the process of picking up another victim, an older man in a work-worn merchant's guild uniform. Chewie rose and pulled Han out of the building to stand in the shadows of the alley. It suddenly occured to Han what his new friend was planning and he chuckled himself. "You said it, Chewie. We not only get my money back, we get a reward for helping stop a robbery in progress. Lucky times, pal, lucky times."

They waited a few minutes, then the couple emerged from the side entrance into the alley that seemed murky and shadowy even in daylight. Three shadows poked their heads up over the discarded storage crates at the corner, and Han pulled his knife. "Too bad it isn't a blaster, but it'll do. Come on, don't just stand there, fuzzball. Let's go get our money back."

SING A SONG OF SOLO

Jacqueline Taero



Sing a song of Solo,
A pocket full of credits.
Solo dropped his cargo
And Jabba won't forget it.
When the hold was opened,
They couldn't find the spice.
And that's why Solo wound up
Inside a cake of ice.

Corellian Thoughts

Yvonne Harrison

illustrated by Karen River

Waking up this morning isn't as easy as it used to be. When I open my eyes and the light causes instant blindness coupled with a splitting headache I come to the conclusion that I have a hangover. Along with the realization comes the memory of a girl. I roll over - only she isn't there! A quick check of my clothes reveals that my money has accompanied her. Three hundred credits - gone. My hangover feels worse. I glance at a chronometer and get a bigger shock. It's been two days since I left the company of Luke and Leia. Two days. I must have been drugged (what was that girl's name?). I'll have to tell Leia what happened but I'll omit certain details. If she finds out about the girl life won't be worth living.

* * * *

As I walk back to the classy apartment Leia is renting I tell myself not to be such a coward. Leia is probably worried sick about me. Despite this reassurance I provide myself with I still walk as slowly as possible. I go in the back way and count the steps as I move towards the third floor. As a kid I found bursting into tears quite effective but at the grand old age of eighty-eight Corellian years it just doesn't work. Especially in court.

I walk in and can see instantly Leia is not the slightest bit worried about me. Instead she looks ready to kill me. I guess I don't look in immaculate condition. I see my image in a mirror. Beer stains and beard stubble. I look a mess.

Leia looks at me and says: "And just where have you been?"

If her voice got much colder there'd be icicles hanging off her teeth.

I grin at her not really knowing what else to do. I am desperate to avoid her gaze. If I continue to meet her stare I know I'll crack and spill out everything that happened. I look down at the floor and study my boots. It is then I notice a stain on my shirt not caused by alcohol. Oh hell! It's makeup - a pale pinkish shade, hardly noticeable except for the horrible fact that it's scented. I sure hope Leia hasn't got a highly developed sense of smell. I have to get out of this tricky situation some how. I decide to fake feeling sick.

I put my hand to my stomach and rush into the bathroom. I throw open the window and stand there gulping air trying desperately to think of some way out. I try to remove the stain with water but it won't come off. Leia knocks on the door.

"Are you alright?" she says.

I groan as effectively as I can. She leaves me alone. From outside I hear Chewie growling. He knows I am faking - luckily no one can understand Wookiee apart from me.

After a few more minutes I decide I can't stay here forever. I make a dash for my bedroom.

I make it to my room undetected. Fling open the door to find Leia there. The sweet kid is straightening up my bed. She tells me if I don't feel well I should be in bed. I laugh because it sounds like a proposition. She says I have a dirty mind, maybe I should get it laundered. I agree to put her in a good mood. She leaves.

I sit down on the bed and throw off my shirt and jacket, making sure the shirt falls so the stain isn't showing (I never was a tidy person). I climb into bed and Leia comes in with a painkiller. She's turned into a bundle of sympathy and would like nothing better than to give this poor sick boy a hug. I would like nothing better than a cuddle but Luke has appeared in the doorway. He is about to tell me his opinion of me but sees my condition and decides it can wait. Behind him stands Chewbacca who growls again, he is just about ready to go for my throat. Leia tells him to shut up - can't he see I'm a sick man?

"What happened, Han?" Luke's voice is full of concern.

"I got mugged. Someone took all the money, drugged me." I shrug helplessly. I can see that gleam come into Chewbacca's eyes - it's the type he gets when he's ready to pull someone apart from the seams. So far he's exercising great control. I know with his keen sense of smell, he can detect the scent. He gives me one last disgusted look and leaves in a huff.

Luke tells me it wasn't my fault considering the circumstances and then he leaves too.

"Alone at last" I tell Leia. I reach out to her but she has decided to tidy my room. A hand reaches down for my shirt. I protest, I tell her I like my room untidy, everything is fine, she needn't bother. She sniffs the air and then peers closely at my shirt. When she looks up again, she's ready to break my jaw.

"Why you...dirty, double crossing...a - *woman*!"

"Why'd ya expect - a Bantha?" I pick the wrong time to be witty. She gives a scream and goes for my throat. I leap out of bed, run out of the room as fast as I can then race down the corridor, Leia chasing me. Just as I think I've escaped I run straight into Chewbacca. Chewie grabs me and refuses to let go. Leia comes up and boots me.

"That hurt!"

She boots me again for good measure. Chewbacca is roaring at the top of his lungs, Leia is yelling at me. Luke comes to see what all the commotion is about.

He pulls Leia off.

"Luke! Good to see you pal, you're just in time." He gives me a patronizing stare. He frequently uses those when I get out of line. "There's been a slight misunderstanding" says I, spreading my hands. Leia then spoils everything by screaming out,

"He was with a woman! Those two days we searched for him, worried about him - he was *enjoying* himself!"

For one ghastly moment I think Luke is going to run me through with his lightsaber. He is angry - I haven't seen him look so mad in ages. He's going bright red in the face, he seems close to apolexy. He calms down using his great Jedi control. It's a pity Leia can't do the same thing.

He tells Chewbacca to let me go. Then they all gather in a group a little way down the corridor out of my range of hearing. They seem to be planning a course of action. I have an awful feeling I'm not going to like what is about to happen....

* * * *

I stare out of the window of the apartment. This is terrible. They've locked me in. Luke said if I feel so bad I can just stay at home while they enjoy themselves. I could try climbing to freedom but I might just break my neck.

Great looking girls go to and fro beneath my window. I can see Chewie's towering figure. He's sitting at a table drinking beer. I sigh, I suppose I deserve it but it may be a while before I can forgive them.

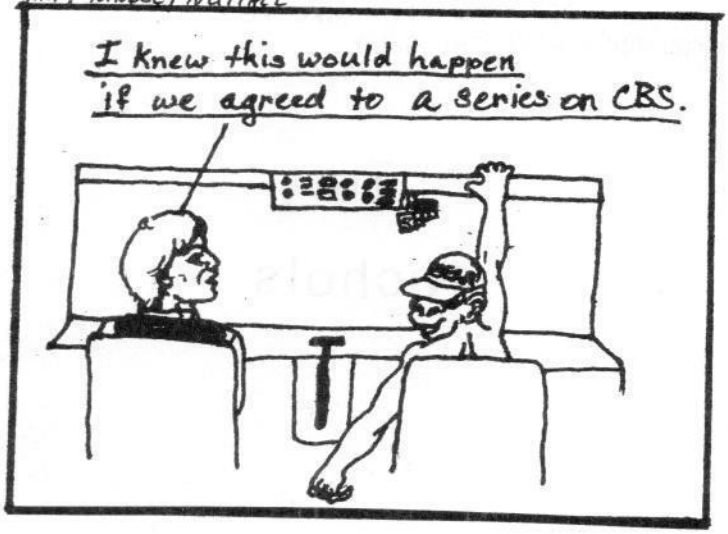
Luke said he didn't know how the Generals were going to take my misappropriation of Rebel funds (I keep telling them about the girl but no one believes me.) I reminded him that most of the three hundred credits was mine and Chewie's. This is an extremely sore point with my first mate, he has yet to talk to me.

I try the door one more time. It won't budge and they've fixed it so I can't pick the lock.

I sit down to eat my meal alone, miserably I watch three rotten holo-movies, then go to bed.

My holidays are getting worse - next time I'll try going by myself.

CONCEPT: Harry Nuttall
ART: Lindsey Nuttall



If I Only Had the Gold

tune: "If I Only Had a Brain"

As I fly away the hours,
Conferring with Chewbacca
As we hit hyperspace.
I'm a top Corellian pirate,
And the Falcon you can hire it
If you only have the gold.

Oh, we made the run from Kessel,
Less than twelve parsecs in this vessel--
That's common knowledge now,
Imperial starships I'm avoidin',
And with spices could be loadin'
If you only have the gold.

(Chorus:)

Oh, I could live so high
On the things that gold could buy:
I could drink of drinks I've never drunk before--
And then I'd sit
And drink some more.

I would not just be a pirate,
My ship you could not hire it;
No bounties out on me.
But perhaps I'll never make it,
So if you offer now I'll take it--
IF YOU ONLY HAVE THE GOLD.

Tia

Nichols

GORDON CARLETON

A Small Accident

Mark Walton

illustrated by Larry Blake

The *Millennium Falcon* roared out of hyperspace. Han Solo and his partner were looking forward to getting well paid after their last mission for the Rebel Alliance.

"Y'know, Chewie, one more job like this and we can retire for life."

Chewbacca grunted disbelievingly. Han Solo would never have enough money to retire on. And if he did he'd be bored out of his mind within a month.

"All right," answered the Corellian, "so I won't retire. But at least we'll be able to choose our missions."

The Wookiee looked at him questioningly. "Only the real profitable jobs," Solo explained. His partner smiled broadly in full agreement.

Suddenly their scanners picked up another spacecraft approaching the main Alliance base, just as they were. Chewbacca mouthed concern.

"Yeah," agreed Solo, "according to the schedule, there shouldn't be any patrols out in this sector now. And they ain't expecting any incoming craft. Except us of course."

Chewie recognized the other craft first. He groaned and hooted in excitement.

"It's a TIE all right. But what's it doin' so close the main base? We'll have to get it fast. Use the jammer, Chewie. If he transmits his position the whole Imp Fleet'll be here with old Tinhead in the lead."

The Wookiee's paws fairly flew over the dials and switches on the control console, his grunts informing his partner that all transmissions from the enemy craft were being effectually stopped.

Chewbacca swung the ship around. Solo carefully maneuvered his guns, waiting until the TIE should get close enough. "We gotta get 'im on the first shot, or he might just get away and tell 'em everything."

Chewie started to get excited again. "Yeah, I see," answered Solo. "He's heading straight in like he knows just what's there. We'll have to disable him, Chewie. Gotta grab the pilot alive and in one piece."

The Corellian swung his laser mount just a fraction of a degree to the right and fired into seemingly empty space. The TIE flew straight into the burst as if the *Millennium Falcon* wasn't even there. Han's blast connected with one of the Imperial fighter's solar panels.

As the debris floated away into space, the TIE fighter began to drift slowly toward the surface of Tennion II, turning end over end as its pilot struggled to keep it under control.

Solo and Chewbacca watched the spectacle unemotionally. "I'll bet Her Superiority will be askin' that pilot a million questions. I almost feel sorry for the guy," commented the Corellian. "But we sure nailed him, just right."

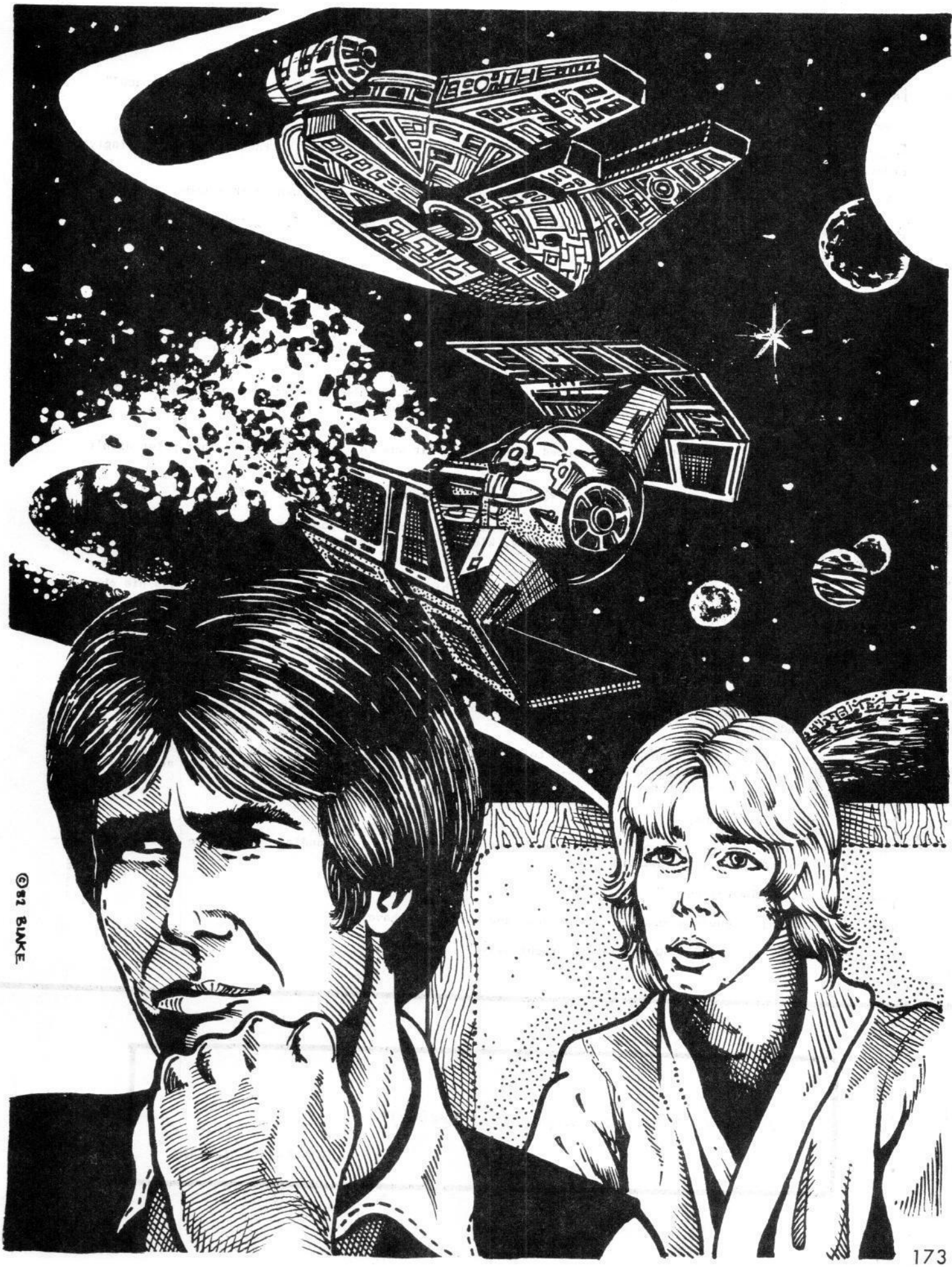
Suddenly a smile broke over his face. "You know, we can add a little surcharge to our bill, after this special operation. After all, we did use up a lot of extra energy. We fired the lasers."

The Wookiee grunted several times and this seemed to broaden Solo's smile. "Yeah, we'll make it a big surcharge! Set her down easy, Chewie."

The *Falcon* got her landing clearance without any trouble. Once down Solo quickly reported in. The TIE had set down quite a distance from the base perimeter; so it would be several timeparts before its pilot could be located, captured, and returned for questioning.

Han and Chewie had no opportunity to make themselves comfortable. Their mission had been highly classified. This meant a long spell of debriefing before they could get paid. They did find out, however, that Princess Leia was also absent. That fact made both of them happy.

Several timeparts later, after the debriefing, the two mercenaries were relaxing at the bar. They'd already had a few rounds when Luke Skywalker came in. The young pilot's face boded trouble. He was mumbling and looking at the floor.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"Uh, hi, Han. How's things?" he gulped.

"Real fine, kid. Say, did you hear about the way I scotched that Imp, just as we came out of hyperspace?"

"Yeah," replied Luke. "I headed the search for the pilot." He spoke wearily.

"Come on, kid, have a drink." Chewbacca agreed, literally pulling the young man to the bar. Solo smilingly ordered the extra drink.

Luke surprised both of them by refusing it. "No, not now." He spoke more confidently this time.

"What is it, kid?" Solo became demanding. He didn't like the idea of anybody refusing a drink as his guest.

"It's the pilot," Luke stammered.

"You picked him up alive, didn't you?" retorted Solo.

"Yes," Luke answered cautiously.

"Don't keep us waiting. Spill it!" Solo was becoming angry, his temper slowly reaching its boiling point. His partner, knowing the Corellian well, emphasized the demand, loudly.

The Wookiee's persuasiveness did have some effect on the young Jedi. "The pilot was one of our people." Luke's eyes never left the floor. "Han, you blasted one of us, a Rebel."

"How the blazes was I to know it!" Solo exploded vehemently. "It was an Imp TIE fighter. That pilot didn't broadcast any of the recognition codes!"

"There was no chance, Han," Luke explained. "You did jam all transmissions, didn't you?"

"Of course I did. Couldn't take a chance on his informing the Imps of his position, which happened to be our main base." Solo defended himself vigorously. "Hey, kid, in this business you got to think fast and act faster, if you want to stay alive, that is."

Suddenly Chewie put in his two centims. Then he stood with his feet wide apart, arms folded across his chest.

Han translated. "The pilot's down all in one piece, ain't he? That's all that counts."

"Yes, she's all right, but she's really mad at you. She recognized your ship," admitted Luke.

"She!" exclaimed Solo. "You mean I blasted some female in that hulk?"

Luke nodded. "She was being held, transported I mean, on a small Imperial cruiser. She managed to break out of detention and steal a TIE."

Solo suddenly smiled. "That's one helluva way to get introduced to a girl. I'll have to look her up. I'll convince her it was all an unavoidable accident." Chewie beamed agreement. He knew his partner's abilities, especially where females were concerned.

"I don't think it will work, Han."

"Of course it will. There ain't a woman in the galaxy that Han Solo can't handle. Who is the little girl, anyway?" The Corellian was still smiling.

Luke whispered. "The Princess."

Solo's eyes bulged. Chewie slammed his drink down and turned to leave.

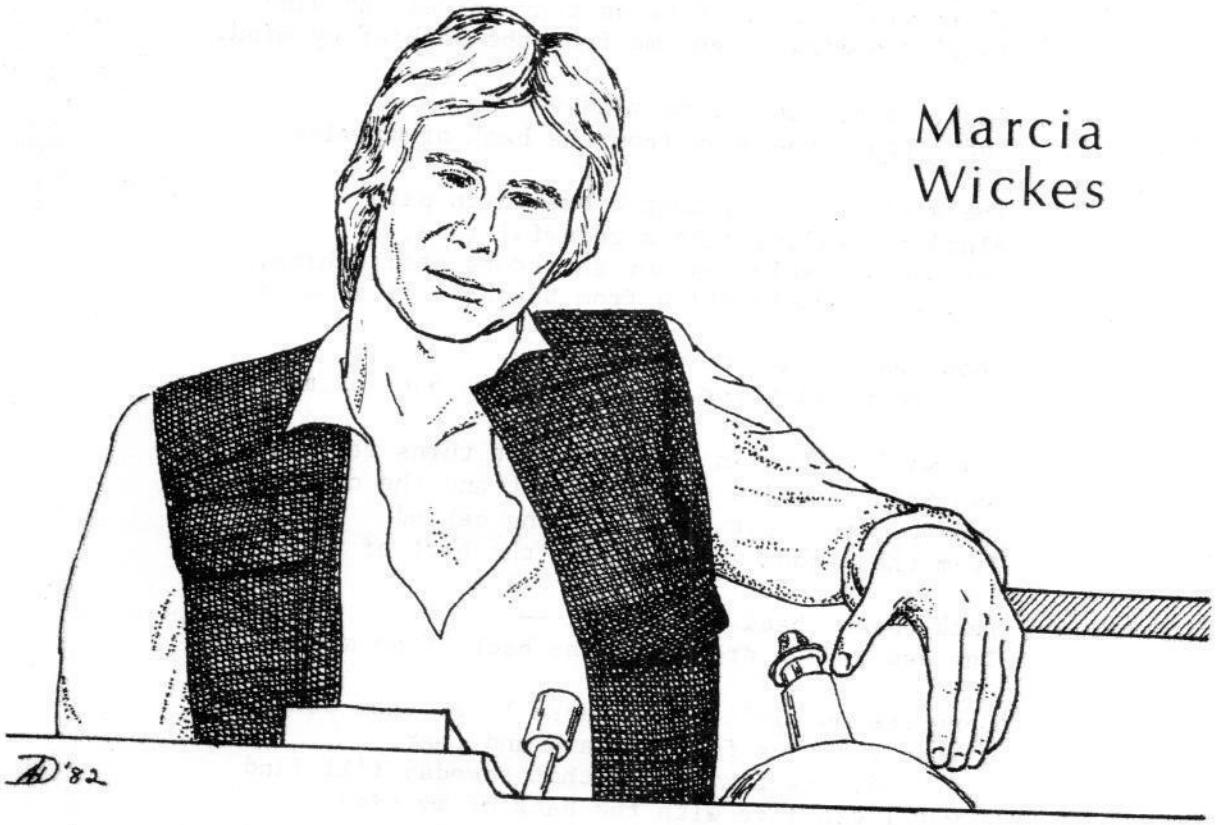
"Chewie, warm up the engines! We're leavin' right away!"

Indiana Jones, how do you spell relief?

A-N-T-I-V-E-N-I-N

HERO OF YAVIN

They ain't about to write of me;
No songs; I did it selfishly!
Well, hell, the kid was gonna die--
Oh, no, I ain't for bravery.
And all this 'hero' stuff, a lot
Of nonsense--no hero gets caught
The way I did; just rotten luck.
I'll never fit the hero slot.
Kenobi fooled me, that was it.
So can the volunteering bit!
I ain't about to do it twice!
You think I care? You're fulla--
What?
Well, maybe just a little line
Or two--if Leia's really cryin'--
But none of that heroic stuff.
Say "mercenary"--that's just fine.
The future? I don't set no store
By rebels--never did before.
They need my ship? Why, you can tell
The kid . . . I'll take him . . . just once more!



Back of My Mind

Martie Benedict

A deathwind's rising through the trees,
Smoke and fire on a Halloween breeze
And the bodies are piled up, eyes open and blind
They're staring at me from the back of my mind.

Back, back, back of my mind --
And I can't turn my back on the back of my mind.

Skies are full of angels of light
Seared-edged eagles in the burst-apart night
Their wings are on fire as they spiral and wind
They're coming to get me from the back of my mind.

Back, back, back of my mind --
And I can't run away from the back of my mind.

The air's so heavy that a breath is pain
Blood is falling like a godawful rain.
The sun is exploding but the stars still shine,
Crying for destruction from the back of my mind.

Back, back, back of my mind --
They're begging for death from the back of my mind.

The walls close in and and night turns red
Run from the fire and the night and the dead
Run from the fear that's coming behind
From the demons and dream in the back of my mind.

Back, back, back of my mind --
The demons and dreams in the back of my mind.

Some dreams ain't bad, 'cause I see them clear
I wasn't always full of pain and fear.
And, God, how I'm hoping that someday I'll find
A way I can live with the back of my mind.

Back, back, back of my mind --
Got to get it straight with the back of my mind.

Lybarger '81

Persuasion

Sheila Paulson

Tommy?

Yeah, rabbi?

You're going away, aren't you?

Well, whadd'ya expect? I gotta make a living, don't I?
'Sides, you got yourself a brand new wife.
Guess you and Rosalie don't need me hanging around.

But Tommy, where will you go?

Ain't decided that yet.
Someplace where there's banks and trains to rob.
Someplace where a fella can make a living.

I thought you were done with things like that.

Well, yeah, but that's all I know, rabbi.
I ain't got none of that fancy book learning.
Might have a go at finding a gold strike, maybe.
That suit you better?

Why can't you stay here in San Francisco?
Get a job, settle down?
I would be happy to have you stay here.

Yeah, I know, but you got a wife, you got all those people.
I saw the way they looked at me at your wedding.
You don't need me to mess things up for you around here.
This is a good place for you , Avram.
Me, I ain't nothing but a bank robber.
I'd probably shame you somehow.

I would be honored to have you stay.
You are my friend, Tommy.
I don't understand why you must go.

Ain't I just told ya?
What more do you want to hear?

Tommy, do you want to go?

What's that got to do with anything?
Quit grinnin' at me like that.
I'm going and that's all there is to it.

But I don't want you to go.

You said that to me before.
Shee-it, Avram, don't you never give up?

Nope.

That's what I was afraid of.
Hell, rabbi, you're more trouble than you're worth, you know that?

Tommy?

Yeah, rabbi?

Will you stay?

Hell, rabbi, I don't know.
Maybe I'll stick around a little, see how things work out.
But don't go thinkin' you talked me into it, huh?
Just ain't got nothing better to do, you hear me?

Yes, Tommy.

They got banks and trains and all that here and ...
Don't look at me like that.
Can't ya tell when somebody's kiddin' ya?

Tommy?

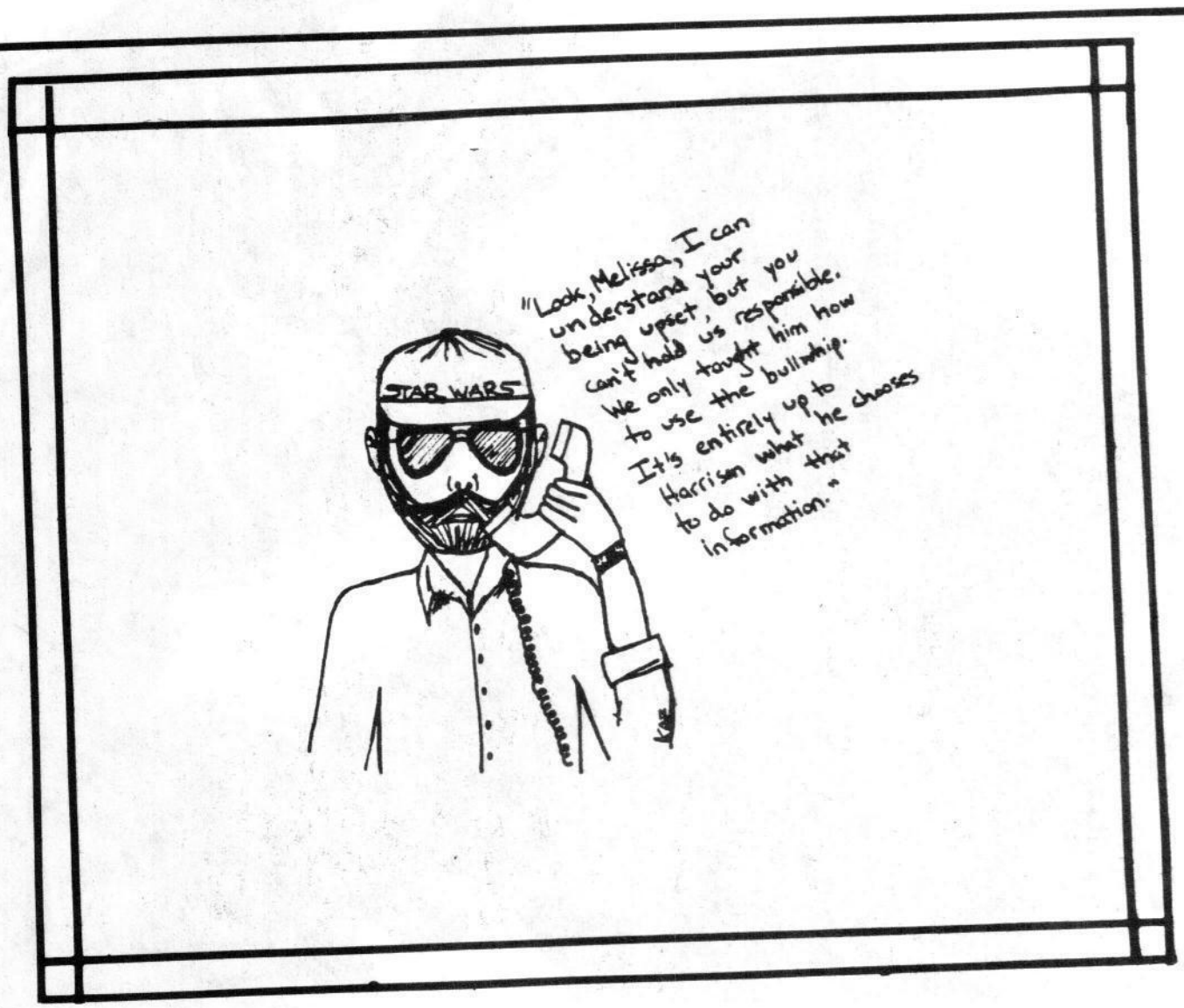
Yeah, rabbi?

I'm glad you're going to stay.

Rabbi?

Yes, Tommy?

Guess I am, too.


STAR WARS
"Look, Melissa, I can understand your being upset, but you can't hold us responsible. We only taught him how to use the bullwhip. It's entirely up to Harrison what he chooses to do with that information."

Raiders of Slave One

By KAZ & BJ

Starring

Mark Hamill — **Harrison Ford** — **Carrie Fisher**
Jeremy Bulloch — **John Colecos**

Executive Producer.....George Lucas
Directed by.....Glen Larson
Original Score by.....Gustav Holst
Performed by the London Symphony Orchestra, John Williams conducting.

Rarely is one treated to a movie which combines magnificent special effects, an overwhelmig musical score, superb acting, and a truly rememberable plot. Such a movie is "Raiders of Slave One."

Due to the phenomenal success of "Raiders of the Lost Ark" with his collegue Steven Spielberg, George Lucas has teamed up with Glen Larson to produce "Raiders of Slave One," which promises to be the record-breaking movie of the season.

Commissioned by the Rebel Alliance, Indiana Jones must find the frozen Han Solo. In this he is successful, but as he takes Solo from Boba Fett, the Captain is wrest from his hands by the villianous Baltar (whose absent-minded android Lucifer repeatedly calls him by erroneaous names such as Belloq and Mikkos). At the climax of the film Jones confronts Baltar to rescue Solo and before Baltar is pushed through an airlock to die in the frozen emptiness of space he confesses that there is as yet no known method of freeing a human from carbonic snow. Jones returns Solo to a grateful Alliance which crates him and places him in a large storage and supply hall while their scientists struggle to find a way to release him. In the true cliff-hanger fashion, the audience is left in suspense for three years until the next movie to learn the fate of Solo.

"Raiders" (subtitled "Episode V½ of The Adventures of Luke Skywalker") is graced by a moving musical score composed by Gustav Holst, best known for his symphony "The Planets." Holst's is the style of music we've grown so accustomed to hearing in science fiction film soundtracks, parelleled by such classic scores as those for "Star Wars," "The Empire Strikes Back," "Star Trek — The Motion Picture," and "Raiders of the Lost Ark," to name a few. His catchy motifs have a rememberable quality and one seems to hear them in the most unexpected places. The agelessness of Holst's music is a truly strong influence on contemporary composers, as the observant listener may have noted.

The stunning special effects, created by John Dykstra, are key points in "Raiders." They draw the viewer into the film with their realism. Of special interest to Dykstra fans are the multiple views of explosions. This repetition of special effects footage is no doubt one of the advantages gained by Larson's participation in the production. One should also note the variety of backgrounds, whether studio or on-location, which range from the deep reaches of space, to futuristic spacecraft interiors, to lush tropical jungles reminiscent of the islands off the coast of Venezuala.

The acting of "Raiders" is commendable. Not since Sir Alec Guinness performed in "Kind Hearts and Coronets" have we seen multiple roles portrayed with such skill as Harrison Ford lends to his dual rolls of Han Solo and Indiana Jones. Switching characters during production is difficult and any actor who accomplishes it so successfully is to be commended. Regretfully, the viewers are not treated to Ford's full capacity as an actor since the character Han Solo has no spoken lines. Perhaps in the forthcoming "Raiders of Navarrone" Harrison Ford's versatility will shine through even more as he takes on the rolls of Indiana Jones and the undercover agent hired by the late Belloq's estate, Martin Stett.

The performance of John Colecos as Baltar is another of the fine points of "Raiders." Colecos' character is killed; however if this film is made into a television series (as rumors suggest) this footage may be cut so that Baltar remains as antagonist, perhaps to join forces with Darth Vader in a later episode. In a recent interview, Colecos (wearing his "Who shot O'Reilly?" tee-shirt) said, "I'd really enjoy it if "Raiders" were made into a television show. I feel comfortable working in a continuous TV series." When asked if he feared Baltar would not remain alive and appear in the series, he replied, "They'd never do that. Look at what happened the last time Larson went into a second series without Baltar!"

"Raiders of Slave One" opens today at select area theaters and promises to be a huge box-office hit. It has something for everyone and proves to be a most enjoyable movie. And as for the ending — Lucas, your fans are waiting.

Regrets

Marcia Brin

Why didn't I say it?
I love you, too.
Hotshot.
Damn fool
Spend my whole life running from my feelings,
wearing my cynicism like a shield,
holding the galaxy at arm's length with a quip,
afraid of committment...
No.
Liar.
Afraid of rejection,
afraid of losing,
afraid of being hurt.
Afraid of looking like a fool.
Once.
It had happened once.
Once was enough
I put my heart in cold storage.
She was afraid, too.
Her whole life,
devoted to her people and her cause.
No time for herself,
no time to learn,
to feel,
to be touched.
A matched pair.
So we fought,
and circled,
and hid.
I, behind my flippancy;
she, behind her coldness.
Wanting so desperately,
and so afraid to reach out,
to show what lay inside.
Yet, in the end,
she did.
In front of the enemy,
in defiance of ten thousand years of royal tradition
she said it.
Why didn't I?
I left her with nothing.
If I do not come back,
what has she to carry with her?
Oh, Leia,
forgive me.
I wanted to,
so badly.
(Did it show?
Could you see?)
But it's been so very long since I said them
I'd forgotten how.
Time.
Just a little more time.
And I promise
when I come back,
(damn you, Sith, I will come back)
it will be the first thing you
hear in the morning
and the last thing you hear at night.
And we'll laugh about "I know."
And if I don't make it...
you know.
Don't you?

WANTED

So Jabba finally lost his patience.
And though you may be
the best smuggler in the business,
you've provoked him once too often.
He's put a price on your head so high
every bounty hunter in the galaxy
will be on your trail.
Including Boba Fett.
It's almost enough to make a man find
an out of the way planet and retire.
For you, it only makes the game more exciting.
But Boba Fett serves two masters.
And you're just a pawn
in a bigger game than you imagine.
Right now every day's a challenge.
But what are you going to do
when your luck runs out?

Karin

Zygowicz

VHF
Heavy Times (Han)
Kessel Run (Han)
Life on the Edge (Han)
Indiana (Indy)
The UPGIGIBFHS Blues (Han)
No One Will Know I'm Gone (Han)
Run with the Sun (Indy)
All the Stars That Burn (Han)
Ballad of Ludee and Han (Han)
Galaxy Turns (Star Wars)
Celestial Gardens (Fantasy)
To Hell with the Corporate Sector (Han)
Eternity Man (Han)
Keep It Together (Han)
Starport Lady (SF)
Smiles (Han)
Feel Like a Woman (Han)
Rocky Mountain Wine (Ken)
Raiders (Indy)

MORE VHF I
Dedication Reggae (Indy)
Road Muse (Tommy)
Who Do You Love? (Falfa)
Let Me Rest You (Ken)
Halladin's Woman (Han)
Ladies of Abilene (Tommy)
Back of My Mind (Ken)
Quit Messin' With My Heart (Tommy)
Free Flight (Han)

More VHF II
Damn Sure Ready (Ken)
After the Mission (Halloran)
Fortune's a Woman (Han)
Feels So Good (Deckard)
My Whole Life Over (Tommy)
Where in Creation...? (Indy)
Summer on the Mountain (Han)
Eufordia (Everybody)
Coda (Han)

MORE VHF III
Gunhand of Fate (Tommy, from J.A. Berger's story of the same name)
Eyes of Love (Indy)
Natural Man (Harrison)
Odessey (Indy)
Hangin' On (Han)
Backseat Heaven (Falfa)
Day Out of Time (Ken)
Typical Wednesday on Zoris (Han)
Angles Have Wings (Tommy)
Lovin' Han (Han)

MORE VHF IV
Reservations (Han, from Wanda Lybarger's story "Choice")
Simple Pleasures (Tommy)
Siren's Song (Indy)
Damn Gypsy Spacers (Han, et al)
Friends (Ken)
Pillow Song (Corellian Lullabye)
Love Machine (Han)
Middle of the Night (Ken)
Wherever You Go (Tommy)
Lying in the Dappled Shade (Han)

MORE VHF V
Time on My Hands (Ken)
Gettin' Back to England (Barnsby)
Cage Bird Sings (Tommy)
Alone (Han)
Indiana Man (Indy)
Don't Go Away (Falfa)
Touch Me (Voolan Love Chant, Han by extension)
Kenny's Improvisation Song (Ken, based on characters and situations created by Sherry Magee and Dianne Wickes)
One Step Ahead of the Law (Han)
All the Gentle Ladies (Harrison)
Take Me Away (Han, from a Wanda Lybarger painting)
A Short Conversation (M. Stett)
Moonsilver (Han, from the story of the same name)
One More Time (Tommy)

MARTIE BENEDICT
P.O. Box 89
Eckert, Colorado 81418-0089
(303) 835-3298

VHF is a song cycle born of the composer's need to say it with music. There's ballads, blues, rock, the Island sound, country, folk and a few uncategorizable things, all inspired by Harrison and his film incarnations.

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VHF is recorded in stereo on high bias chrome masters. The quality of your copies will depend upon the type of blank tape you send me for dubbing. High bias Maxell, TDK-SA or Radio Shack's Supertape Chrome are recommended for best reproduction. TDK, Maxell and Realistic are also good quality for normal bias reproduction.

Since I use copyrighted characters in my songs, I don't charge for the music. I DO request, however, you include either an adequately stamped SASE or sufficient postage to mail your tapes back to you. And, like any non-profit and charitably disposed institution, I DO accept free-will contributions, donations, alms, love-offerings and loose change. **VHF** is a labor of love. But love doesn't pay the rent around here.

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More VHF IV.....60 minute cassette
More VHF V.....60 minute cassette

VHF LOVE SONGS
Night's Almost Over (Han)
Silence When You're Gone (Han)
Spiral Down (Han)
If I Could (Any or all)
I'm Your Pillow (Han)
Leaving for Aurellia (Han)
Gettin' the Feelin' (Indy)
Share a Little Love (Han)
Wanderer (Han)
No One Ever Kissed Me Like You (Ladies' choice)
Deep and Secret Places(Ditto)
Maggie, for a Moment (Halloran)
Lady of Fantasy (Han)

VHF STAR SONGS
Every Inch a Spacer (SF)
Sundog Solli's Casino (Han)
Survivor (Han)
Portsiders' Blues (SF)
Spread Your Wings (SF)
The Ballad of D'Kota Lee (Han, by extension)
Queen of the Constellations (SF)
The Ballad of Traeger Jona (SF)

FACETS

#1- #4 are permanently out of print. However, xerox copies may be obtained from Lori Chapek-Carleton, 5132 Jo-Don Dr., E. Lansing, Mich. 48823. She has xeroxing rights to these and any other FACETS that go out of print. SASE for her price list.

#5 -- our holiday issue, dedicated to every holiday in the book. Contents include: "Tidings of Comfort and Joy" by Denise Sheets (a small boy and a teddy bear make a small miracle for Officer Bob Falfa); "Home for Christmas" by Sherry Magee (Ken Boyd's uneasy Yule with the family he never really came home to); "The Way Home" by Sheila Paulson (it's Life Day, Han and Chewie are in jail, but Han has a way out -- for Chewie); "Festival in Paradise" by J.A. Berger (a life renewal festival on an exotic world may be more than Han, Luke and Leia bargain for); "A Day in the Life of Han Solo" by Eva Albertsson (a combination Life Day and Halloween tale); plus poetry by Sheila Paulson, Sherry Magee and Meg Garrett, and art by Martynn, Paulie, Gordon Carleton, Dianne Wickes, Joni Wagner, and Larry Blake. Price: $5.90 first class, $4.50 in person, or add the cost of 6 oz. to Kalamazoo via UPS to the in-person rate.

#6 -- also still in print. Contents include: "An Honest Job" by Elyse Dickenson (going straight can be hazardous to your health); "Intergalactic Colloquy" by Eva Albertsson (what sort of conversation might Han and Harrison have?);"Second Time Around" by Chris Jeffords (Han and Lando, round one); "Home is the Hunter" by Kelly Hill (Avram's been shot and Tommy Lillard is out for vengeance); "Occupational Hazard" by Eva M.E. Oslo (the prequel to the fateful meeting in the cantina); "Changes" by Sherry Magee (the prequel to "Home for Christmas" in #5); "A Bad Case of Corellian" by J.A. Berger (Han and Leia are captured by slavers who think Han in in rut!); plus poetry by Susan Matthews, Tammy and Lynne Monfette, Chris Cohea, Lynne Terry, Karen Trimble, Karin Zygowicz, Sheila Paulson and Kelly Hill; and art by Martynn, Paulie, Gordon Carleton, Bec Aulenbach, Larry Blake, Pam Kowalski, Dianna Wickes, Wanda Lybarger, Cathy Strand Stephanie Hawks, and Daphne Hamilton. Price: $7.90 first class, $6 in person, or add the cost of 10 oz. via UPS to Kalamazoo to the in person cost.

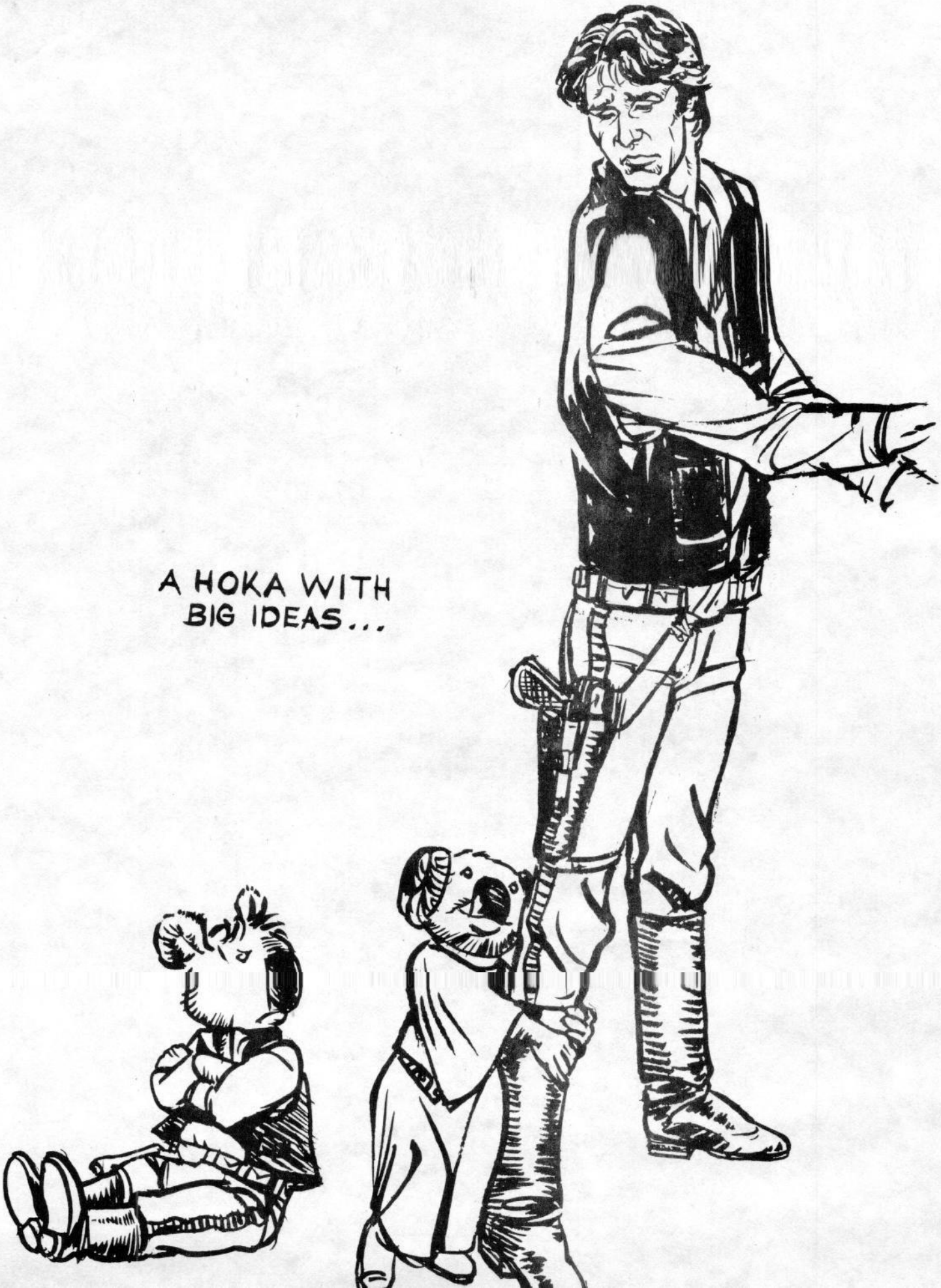
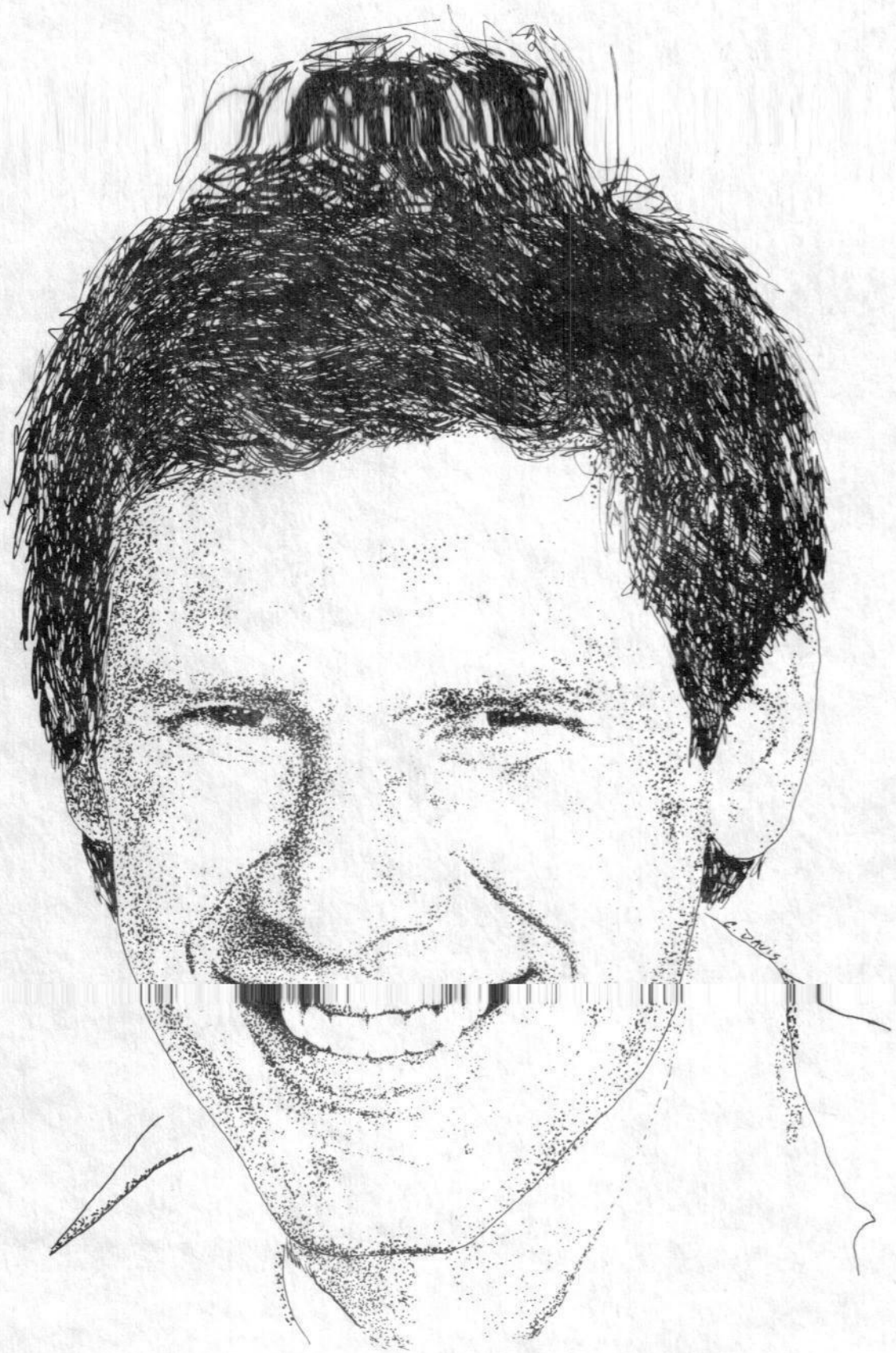
#7/8 -- our first double ish. Contents include; "The Ganna Two Affair" by Martie Benedict (Han, a pretty girl, a fugitive prince and a deadly race all add up to excitement);"Lesser Artifacts" by Peggy Barilla (Indiana Jones meets his match in the jungle of Guatemala); "The Many Faces of Captain Solo" by Chris Callahan (the times, life and ways of out favorite Corellian); "Rainbows" by Kelly Hill (the night before Jack's visit, Ken Boyd does a little soul-searching); "The Invisible Fan" by Eva Albertsson (a famous Actor, an infamous Pirate and the demands of fandom); "I Do?" by Lindsey Nuttal (a comedic look at Han and Leia's wedding day); "Partners" by Lindsey Nuttal (the first of two versions of the rumored court-martial); "My Diary, 1926 A.D." by Martie Benedict (see Indiana Jones through the eyes of a fifteen-year-old Marion); "Eyes of a Jedi" by J.A. Berger (the story of 'that bounty hunter we ran into on Ord Mandell'); "Happily Ever After" by Dannell Lites (and the new diplomat just thought he was getting a cushy job);plus poetry by Marcia Wickes, Jan Gaut, Martie Benedict, Mary Carson, Judith Balcombe, Lindsey Nuttal, Kathy Percy, Marcia Brin, Karen Miller, Ann Wilson and Jacqueline Taero; and art by Martynn, Paulie, Gordon Carleton, Karen River, Connie Pirovetes, Carol McPherson, Daphne Hamilton, Lindsey Nuttal, Cathy Strand, Martie Benedict, Linda Stoops, Wanda Lybarger, Dianne Wickes, Dot Sasscer, Stephanie Hawks, Larry Blake, Barbara Fister-Liltz, Barb Stultz and J.R. Dunster. Price: $11.10 first class, $8.50 in person, or add the price of 12 oz. via UPS to Kalamazoo to the in-person rate.

#9/10 -- another double. Contents include: "Indiana, Where You Been?" by Wanda Lybarger (an essay on the Hero in film); "Raiders of the Lost Orc" by Martie Benedict (Indiana Jones meets the Lord of the Rings); "Twink" by Martie Benedict (the adventurous sequel to "The Ganna II Affair" in #7/8); "Just Like Starting Over" by Lindsey Nuttal (after 13 years of marriage, Han gets cabin fever); "Gunhand of Fate" part one, by J.A. Berger (two men are shot, an Army payroll is stolen, and the evidence points to Tommy Lillard); "Troubleshooter" by Martie Benedict (a religious cult, a disaster-prone secret agent, and an alien uprising have Han up in arms); "Ultimate Fan-tasy" by Eva Albertsson (a fannish dream come true -- or is it?); "Winterstalk" by Wanda Lybarger (a first for FACETS, and by no means a last -- a story in comic book format); "Corellian Thoughts" by Yvonne Harrison (a hung-over Han contemplates his fate); plus poetry by Karen Ann Weikert, Cathie Whitehead, Karin Zygowicz, Jane Firmstone-Rafferty, Martie Benedict, Marcia Wickes, Lynne Terry, Sara Fensterer, Martynn, Jacqueline Taero, Gracia Fay Elwood, Tia Nichols, and Sheila Paulson; and art by Martynn, Paulie, Gordon Carleton, Larry Blake, Karen River, Daphne Hamilton, Barbara Fister-Liltz, Wanda Lybarger, Carol McPherson, Cherie Abell, Bec Aulenbach, Pat Wynne, Gee Moaven, Barb Stultz, and J.R. Dunster. Price:$. first, $. in person, or add the price of via UPS to Kalamazoo to the in-person rate.

#11 -- now in the planning stages. Tentative contents to include: "Gunhand of Fate" part two, by J.A. Berger; "Gratia Artis" by Eva Albertsson (Indy Jones' venture into an alternate universe, with a hair-raising guide); "Allure of the Punchao" by Melody Womack and Jan Slusher (an ancient Inca idol and a fabled city set the stage for an adventure with Indy and Marcus Brody); "Treasure Hunt" by Sheila Paulson (Han, Lando Calrissian and Chewbacca go on a scavneger hunt that is more than it seems); "Cerullean Dawn" by Martie Benedict (Han and company's search for a 'ghost ship'); "Go Down Moses" by Roberta Rogow (it's Rosh Hashana, and temporary tycoon Tommy Lillard has to aid an escaped slave); "Relative Situations" by Martie Benedict (Han, his old flame, her gunman-brother, and a down ship all figure prominently in this action-adventure yarn); "Step by Step" by Jean Stevenson (ten years ago he walked out, and now he's back. What do you do?); "One Sunday Afternoon" by Kathy Draves (meet the one person in the world Indy quails before ...); plus poetry by Michelle Quesnel, Tia Nichols, Martie Benedict, Cathie Whitehead, Judith Balcombe and many more, and art by Martynn, Larry Blake, Carol McPherson, Paulie, Gordon Carleton, Dot Sasscer, Karen River, Wanda Lybarger, and many more. SASE for price after Sept. 15.

As always, with all submissions please send a SASE (self-addressed stamped envelope) with sufficient postage to return it to you if necessary (we will mark down credit or return the SASE if we accept the piece). All submission must be legibly typed, and we would prefer that art be black and white ink, tho we will screen a truly fine piece done in another medium. If wished, send a business sized SASE for our writer's guidelines (they're basic common sense but here if you want them). Address all submissions and other inquiries, with a SASE, to:

FACETS
1359 Portage, Apt. I
Kalamazoo, Mich. 49001


A HOKA WITH
BIG IDEAS...